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LITTLE TEXAS, The Young Mustanger.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "EAGLE KIT," "SILVER STAR," "SCAR-FACE SAUL," "SURE SHOT SETH," "ROLLO, THE BOY RANGER," ETC.,



"WHO ARE YOU, ANYHOW?" THE YOUNG MUSTANGER ASKED. "I'M BILL MORRELL—OLD MORALITY FOR SHORT."

Little Texas, THE YOUNG MUSTANGER.

A Tale of the Texan Prairies.

BY OLL COOMES.

AUTHOR OF "EAGLE KIT," "SILVER STAR," "SCARFACE SAUL," "SURE SHOT SETH," "ROLLO, THE BOY RANGER," "HAWK-EYE HARRY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE TEXAS.

A SUMMER day on a Texan prairie. A light south wind drifting across the great ocean of verdure comes laden with the sounds of wild excitement.

Savage yells, the thunder of hooved feet, and the occasional report of firearms disturb the silence of the distant wood and quiet valley.

Buzzards, skimming low along the plain in quest of food, soar aloft in affright and wheel away into the blue depths of the sky; the wild deer, reposing in the shade of mottled and bush, starts from its repose and sniffs the air with alarm.

Then out of the distance comes a horseman at a wild, break-neck speed. He is an old man. His face is covered with perspiration and dust. His horse is reeking with foam. He is being pursued. Close behind comes another rider—a boy; and still further on comes a band of wild Apache Indians.

It is a strange chase; the boy appears to be in pursuit of the old man, and the savages in pursuit of the boy.

The foremost fugitive is mounted upon a fine bay horse and is leading a dark chestnut mustang, both remarkable for their beauty and speed. The boy rides a dark bay mustang caparisoned with Mexican saddle and bridle. At the bow of the saddle hangs a coiled lasso.

The young rider was not over seventeen years of age, and possessed of a lithe, yet well-developed form. His face, which was bronzed to the hue of an Indian's, wore an expression of manly pride and courage, while a pair of soft blue eyes looked out from under the brim of his sombrero, full of the spirit of wild adventure and reckless daring.

The chase was a wild and desperate one. The horses of all parties bore evidence of having been long and hard ridden, though that of the boy appeared to be the least fatigued. The savages seemed possessed of the fury of demons, and lashed and spurred their panting beasts onward with fiendish cruelty—brandishing their lances and tomahawks above their plumed heads, shrieking and yelling.

The boy fugitive was far beyond rifle range of his pursuers, and was gaining rapidly upon them, while the distance between him and the old man was momentarily lessening. He was pursued and pursued, and a look of defiance flashed in his eyes as he gazed back at the foe, while a strange, triumphant smile lit up his handsome face as he glanced forward at the old man feeling as if from the wrath of an avenging Nemesis.

Thus, under the burning sun, the chase continued, mile after mile; but the Apache horses were no match in speed for those of the fugitives, and one by one the savages dropped out of the chase until finally the last one had given up in hopeless despair. Between the old man and the boy, however, the race continued; and now that the youth was enabled to give all his attention to the man before, he seemed to gain more rapidly upon him. He took off his hat and swung it above his head in triumph. His long yellow hair floating on the wind at his back, his flashing eyes, his firm-set teeth visible between his parted lips, his lithe form fixed immovably in the saddle, gave him the wild, picturesque expression of a fabled centaur.

The face of the old man wore a different look. Anxiety was written upon it, and as he clutched his revolver in one hand and the reins in the other, he urged his panting horse onward with tongue and spur. His pursuer was now within a hundred yards of him, and, glancing back—watching his chances for a shot—he saw the boy waving his hat above his head, and heard him, quite distinctly call out:

"Hold up! hold up! I'm a friend; don't you see I am, old stranger?"

The man gradually drew up, but in the meantime he kept his eye upon the boy and his finger upon the trigger of his revolver.

In a very few moments more the young horseman had approached within a few paces, when the old man, turning half around in his saddle, raised his pistol, closed one eye and screwing up his mouth, shouted back:

"If you be a foolin' of me, blest if I don't air your innards in a twink!—I will by the smilin' Gatamozin. Halt, there! Do you hear what I'm sayin', baby-face?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the boy, in an easy, good-natured tone. "I'm not deceivin' you, old mossy back. I was a prisoner when the chase begun, and by virtue of a fast horse, I managed to escape from those raiding Apache scoundrels."

"Who are you?" yelled the old man, with a savage frown.

"I'm Little Texas."

"The Boy Mustang?" his eyes opening with astonishment.

"Yes."

"You?" exclaimed the old man, in astonishment, "do you pretend to insinuate that ye-ou are the real, honest, bona fide Little Texas?"

"I do, sir," was the boy's prompt answer.

"Wal, what do you take me for?" the man asked, in a distrustful tone.

"A horse-thief, accordin' to the Apaches' story."

"Uh-hump!" he ejaculated, with compressed lips; "now, youngster, I'll asseverate that I'm not the handsomest critter livin', nor the honestest man in Texas, nor do I possess the sweetest disposition on yearth, but I am the aurora that's rejoiced to collide with Little Texas; and so slap your paw *thar*, you little vagabond of the prairie."

The man seized the Young Mustang's hand and shook it till he fairly rattled in the saddle; at the same time he burst into a peal of hearty laughter.

This odd old stranger was a man of some fifty years of age. He was dressed in a suit of buck-skin, half-civilized and half-savage in style. Upon his head he wore the battered remains of a white hat that was settled down over his small head until his ears were just visible under the broken brim. His nose was of a strong Roman type; his mouth quite large and surrounded by short, stubby whiskers, well stained with sun and tobacco-juice.

There was nothing at all repulsive in the appearance of the man—nothing to denote the characteristics of a Texan horse-thief; but there was something so frank and outspoken in his address, so warm and genial in his nature, and so bluff and comical in the expression of his thin, bearded face, that they convinced Little Texas he had met a brave, jolly and generous-hearted old plainsman.

"Who are you, anyhow?" the Young Mustang asked, as soon as an opportunity was afforded.

"I'm Bill Morrell—old Morality for short. I are the central flogger o' moral gravitation in this 'ere sin-besot land; I are what keeps the morals o' the destrict up to the proper standard—white-heat, ye know! And, sir, I asseverate and affirm that the Injun that says I'm a hoss-thief can discount Ananias so bad that Iyin' in Ana's day looked like truth in-laid with fidelity. These hosses, my festive young gamboller, belong to Senor—well—ahem!—well, at any rate, the Ingins stole 'em fust from their owner and then I waltzed up to the 'Pache country like a tropical wind, inserted my anatomy into their village one night when the lightnin' slid through the sky and the storm wrestled squar' bolts with the old mountain and forest, and—well, here I am, the same smiling sunbeam, Ole Morality."

"Exactly," said the boy; "I see how it is now; but where do you belong?—live, Morality?"

"Anywhere, everywhere and nowhere; that's me, out and out! But, boy, I've heard of you, course I have, and have been dyin' to meet you. You've never been up—over—down our way, have you?"

"Which way is that?"

"Oh, never mind," returned the old man, evasively; "it's anyway and everyway; but I reckon them Ingins 'll still try to foller me up, don't ye think? But if they 'll jist foller up till the last, I'll lead 'em to where they 'll smell brimstone strong. Oh, my little captain, you may beat me throwin' a lasso, or makin' love to some purty gal; but jist rile me up and I'm wusser'n a cactus-burr to sot down on—I'm a hornet's nest full of tar-ant'lers—a small tempest. I war never in love but once in my life and then I got sated so bad that I swore allegiance to woman's s'clety and sailed westward on the fust ox-cart that left the port of Crabtown over in Ingearny. As to takin' in deer and game of any kind, from a cochineal bug to an Injun skulp, I've never see'd the critter that can beat me. Oh, I love to hunt, and, if I never told the truth in my life, I've shot and skinned many a deer afore it quit runnin'. Now that's what I am, my boy."

"And for all this you're called Morality," said Little Texas.

"For all this, and more, too numerous to mention; but, Texas, hadn't we better be moseyin' along?"

"Yes, it's jist as well; our horses are rested."

And so they rode on together.

"What particular occupation do you foller now, Morality?" asked Texas, as they journeyed along.

"Anything that turns up, from herdin' Texan bulls to fightin' regulators and Ingins. I'm handy at anything, from 'fishin' at a weddin'—as a hostler—and commandin' an army—as a scout. I oscillate from one thing to another jist as easy as lightnin' slippin' down a cloud, and I vibrate up and down this kentry jist as nice as a gazelle; but when I take hold, boy, it's got to come or you'll hear somethin' rip. Now, I know you're mathematican enough to put these things all together, subtract what you think doubtful, add fun and frolic to the quotient, find the square root and then you have Old Morality doubly rectified. As to you, boy, I know you from hearsay better than I know the commandments. But say, what do you think of the prospect of the 'Paches catchin' us?"

"I have no more fears of that than of breakin' my neck by fallin' over a gold nugget; but there is danger of Black Boniface's regulators."

"Pizen tar-ant'lers! do you mean to asseverate that them rollickin' vampires are roamin' here-away?"

"I do, for a serious fact, Morality; I'm jist out of the clutches of the villain and his minions, and had stopped to rest when the Ingins stole a march on me. Would you believe it, I give old Bonny a pop on the nose with my fist and made the blood jist spout; but if ever you seen a feller git up and dust it war that very Bonny. By gracious! he resolved to have revenge, and ordered old Doctor Rocheford to amputate my hand; but I tricked the whole kit of them and started out lively. I'll tell you all about it when we stop."

"Great Jolliphagus! I hope they won't find—well," and the old man checked himself as an expression of pain passed over his face, "all one can do is to hope for the best, and do the best he can."

Little Texas saw that the old man could be serious,

that his mind occasionally reverted to something that evidently gave him great concern and uneasiness.

The two rode on at a walk, though they kept a close watch behind them for their pursuers. They finally came to a little creek where they watered their horses and slaked their own thirst. By this time the sun was almost down, still they rode on a few miles further and finally turned into a little motte of timber and halted for the night, providing they were not compelled to move on by danger.

Old Morality had a supply of dried meats, and some water in a canteen, which he divided with the Boy Mustang, and the two made a sumptuous meal. The horses were not unsaddled. Morality picketed his animal out to grass while Texas turned his loose, knowing, that should danger approach, the beast would manifest some signs of alarm. Morality kept watch during the first half of the night, and was relieved by Little Texas. And thus the hours wore away, and with the first streaks of dawn they were ready for departure, but just as they were about to ride from the grove the keen eye of the mustanger discovered War-Ax and his warriors encamped on the open plain not over half a mile east of them. This delayed their departure. Old Morality insisted upon keeping under cover until the course of the Apaches was determined. Little Texas believed that the old man had more reasons than one for thus keeping concealed; but he did not try to fathom one of the secrets of the old fellow's heart.

To the surprise of the two friends, however, the Indians made no preparations for departure as the day advanced, and so it became evident that they were resting there before beginning their homeward journey. It mattered not to Little Texas, after all, how long they remained there. He was in no particular hurry, and so he made up his mind that they would pass another night in the motte together; but to the surprise of both, the Indians mounted their horses about sunset and rode away northward.

This afforded the two friends great relief and gave them the assurance of a quiet night's rest. They unsaddled and picketed their animals to grass in the center of the grove and made a meager supper of the remnants of Morality's supplies.

After darkness set in the two sat down under a tree to converse. The moon came up in a soft blue sky, flooding the landscape in a mellow light. Not a breath of wind was stirring. The sweet perfume of the little grove and the wild prairie flowers was distilled upon the cool night air. The drone of insects, the piping of a tree-frog, the tinkling of the horses' bit-rings, and the occasional cry of a night-bird, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the hour.

"Boy—Little Texas," demanded Old Morality, starting from a reverie, "do you like this kind of life?"

"I like the life of a mustanger," replied the boy; "it is so full of fun and adventure, though I must admit I had all the adventure yesterday with Black Boniface I care about."

"Then Black Boniface is act'ly in the San Sal valley again?"

"Yes, in force; yesterday, as I told you before, I was in his power, and now I'll tell you the particulars. You know there has been a buck-skin mustang at the head of a herd on these prairies that has defied the lassoes of the mustangers for years—"

"Yes, I do that, Texas," interrupted the old man, "and I don't b'lieve there's a boss in Texas that can run that buck-skin down. Do you?"

"Yes, I caught that mustang myself yesterday, and—"

"You did?"

"Yes, after a five-and-twenty-mile chase I took the buck-skin in," continued the youth; "I was offered a hundred dollars by a trader for it; but scarcely had I thrown the animal ere old Boniface and his whole gang surrounded me and demanded my surrender; but I wasn't to be scared by words, and I drew my revolver and let into them, and it's a fact, Morality, I emptied three saddles before they could close in on me."

"Good! good, you little tarapin!" put in the old man.

"But," Texas went on, "they overpowered me and took my horses, and waltzed me off up to the timber where they went into camp. There Black Boniface, the villain, thought he'd git some secrets out of me about some ranches over east that he'd like to raid on; but he couldn't get anything out of me, and so he up and gave me a furious slap on the cheek, and quicker'n a wink I lit into him like a sailor, and I give him a blow on the proboscis that like to kilted him over. The blood jist flew from his nose, and if ever you seen a madman it was that Black Boniface. He fairly raved and tore, and swore that the hand that struck him should be cut off. Among his men is one called Dr. Rocheford. He is a Frenchman, and served in the Mexican army as a surgeon, years ago. He is Boniface's lieutenant. He is the wickedest, cruelest wretch on the top of God's earth; and his looks do not belie him. His eyes are small, squinty and gray, and his face is pitted and plowed by small-pox, and is scarred with the result of many a deadly encounter. Well, Dr. Rocheford was notified that he must prepare to amputate my hand, and the doctor was really delighted. That night the job was to be done, and after an hour's halt I was mounted upon my own horse, Lightfoot, and we set off. Dr. Rocheford couldn't hardly wait for night to come, I wanted to get at me so bad. But we pegged slowly along through the woods, a pirate leading my horse. By the way, Lightfoot was awful lame—he fairly hobbled on three feet. He'd strained his ankle, you see, when I caught the buck-skin—at least, I made old Boniface believe such was the case, though I can

make Lightfoot limp any time, or do anything else. He's an awful smart hoss, Morality, and knows more than all the Apaches in Texas. But, as I was sayin', we went limp in along through the woods till we come to an awful thick spot, when I put a flea in Lightfoot's ear, and away he went—jerked loose from the robber, and if ever you seen a pair of fellows go tearin' through that timber it was Lightfoot and I. Gracious! the trees and bushes fairly smoked behind us we swept apast them so fast! Out into the prairie we sailed, and away we flew over the plain, doublin' on those pirates at every jump. Oh, it was a glorious race—beats ours all holler. I soon left the dancin' villains out of sight and rode on till I reached a little chaparral, where I dismounted to rest and let Lightfoot graze. I was awful tired, and I sat down to rest and fell asleep—somethin' I never done in my life before when in the midst of danger. Well, when I awoke, Lightfoot was frettin'; and, getting up, I looked around. Plagued if I wasn't surrounded by a score of Apaches.

"Great tar-rant'-lers," burst from Old Morality. "I saw there was no escape for me," Little Texas resumed, "for not less'n a dozen glittering lance-points were so near my breast that I was almost afraid to scratch my head. They acted awful mean to'ards me, and kept lookin' around the grove as though they thought there was some more of us about; but finally I found out the whole secret of their presence there, and their strange actions. They were in pursuit of a horse-thief that had stolen two of their horses. They had tracked the thief into that grove, and when they saw me, of course they thought I was the chap; but they soon found I hadn't their horses; but they b'lieved I had somethin' to do with stealin' them, and so they mounted me onto my horse and away we all went again. Lightfoot got lame again, all of a sudden, and it was hard work for us to git along, but the Apaches lashed us up, and after riding a mile or so, who should we discover but the veritable old horse-thief himself, and that was you, Morality."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Morality; "you don't tell me?"

"Yes, I do tell you," replied Texas; "and when we discovered you we give chase. I lingered behind at first, and when I saw the Indians were all crazy on catchin' you, I spoke to Lightfoot, and away we went. A few jumps brought us to the front, and before the Apaches knew what was up, we was out of reach of harm. Oh, mercy! the way Lightfoot did tickle the earth would make a stone man smile, and when I seen you runnin' from me, I thought, to myself, I should explode with—"

"Hark, boy!" suddenly commanded the old man, starting to his feet, and listening.

"What is it, Morality?" asked the Boy Mustanger. "That's somethin' or other—my old ears don't reach out like they did once, boy. You git up and listen, Texas."

The Boy Mustanger rose, threw the saddle on his horse, then crept to the edge of the grove and listened. He heard the sound of trampling hoofs upon the plain, and it seemed to be growing plainer each moment—approaching. The boy withdrew further into the shadows.

Then, from out the depths of the moonlit night and solitude of the boundless plain, he saw two horsemen emerge at a sweeping gallop. They drew nearer and nearer—they were before him—then they were gone like the wind apast him, and were soon lost in the distant shadows.

Little Texas turned and hurried back to his companion.

"That will never do, Morality," he said, in a tone that betrayed some excitement; "there is something wrong. One of those night-riders was a man, the other a woman. I shall follow them, for I repeat it, I believe there is something wrong. Morality, loan me one of your pistols."

The old man complied at once; then, turning, the boy leaped into the saddle, and a moment later he was flying over the moonlit plain upon the trail of the unknown, mysterious night-riders.

And alone under the soft blue sky and mellow moonlight, Old Morality paced to and fro, whistling softly to himself, while a strange smile hovered upon his bearded face.

CHAPTER II.

THE EMIGRANT CAMP.

CAMP on the San Saba river.

The San Saba valley in the twilight of a summer evening.

The sound of human voices mingled with the soft, musical murmur of the river.

A camp-fire burning under the sheltering boughs of mesquit, and cedar and oak.

A dozen canvas-covered wagons drawn up in a circle around the ruddy fire.

Horses, mules and cattle corralled and guarded in the bend of the river below.

In short, an emigrant train encamped there upon the banks of the little Texan river.

Men, women and children, in all numbering some forty or fifty souls, comprised the numerical force of this band of adventurers. I say adventurers, for they were such who dared to breast the hardships and the manifold dangers of Texan wool and Texan plain at the time of which I write; and when Colonel Israel Miles led his little band into the valley of the San Saba, he did not do so without being fully apprised of the step he was taking. He had served his country as a soldier in the Lone Star State years before, and had then remarked the natural advantages the country possessed, and which time must open to the emigrant. Believing that time had come, he had organized his party and set out for the land

of promise; and it is after weeks of weary journeying that we find them encamped on the San Saba.

Looking in upon that camp one would see at once that the emigrants did not consider themselves free from surrounding dangers, for every precaution had been taken to guard against surprise by enemies, of which there were many. The wild Indians, the outlaw Mexicans, and the white robbers, or as they were better known, the regulators, still infested the woods and prairies of Texas, and being fully acquainted with the cowardly and cunning nature of these Bedouins, Colonel Miles was prepared for them. The wagons were drawn up in a hollow square "tongue and tail," and outside of these was piled brush and logs. Four armed men patrolled the camp, while Miles himself kept constantly on the move supervising the care of the stock and the arrangements of the camp.

Colonel Miles was a large and powerful man, with a quick, nervous disposition, and a short, bluff way of speaking that, to a stranger, would seem cold and severe. But no warmer or truer heart ever throbbed than that of Israel Miles. He was a firm friend and relentless enemy, as brave as a lion in the time of danger, as gentle as a child in the family circle. To know the colonel was to love and admire him. He was not at all a handsome man, as far as features were concerned; but this was entirely lost sight of in the beauty of the man's great, generous heart and noble spirit.

The colonel was a bachelor, which is the worst that can be said of him; but this was no fault of his. Death had robbed him of the only woman he had ever loved, more than twenty years before. He was not alone, however, for he had under his guardianship two lovely girls, Christie May Miles and Edith Clayton, of sixteen and twenty years respectively. The one was the child of his dead sister, and the other, of an unfortunate friend, an old school-mate and army comrade. Both of these girls were very handsome and intelligent, and had they been the colonel's own daughters he could not have regarded them more tenderly, for he idolized them. And yet, they were as opposite in many respects as it is possible for two pretty young women to be.

Christie Miles was a dark-eyed little nymph, just budding into lovely womanhood. She was possessed of a sweet, vivacious spirit, and was loved by all who knew her; for her coming was like a sunbeam to a cold and drooping flower, or hope to a cheerless, downcast spirit—dispelling the clouds from the heart and the weight of cares from the mind.

Edith Clayton represented another type of womanhood. She was possessed of a sylph-like form—tall, slender and graceful; soft blue eyes and a wealth of light flaxen hair that seemed to cast around her serene, angelic face a halo of infinite beauty. She was of a rather silent and gentle nature, yet that silence and gentility were possessed of an influence that made her loved and admired by all with whom she chanced to meet.

The emigrants had been encamped in the San Saba valley for several days. For all they knew they were at their journey's end, or nearly so. Colonel Miles had conceived the idea of planting a colony in Western Texas, and believed the San Saba valley afforded great advantages as an agricultural and stock-raising country; and it was only until they could determine upon a suitable location for permanent settlement that they had gone into camp on the river.

Settlements in this part of Texas at the time of which we write were very few and far between. Here and there might be found a lone cattle-ranch, or the quarters of a band of mus-jagers; and not infrequently were these rancheros and horse-catchers in communication and upon good terms—if not in league—with the wild Indians and white outlaws, or regulators, of the prairie. If they were honest men they were compelled to pay dearly for their boldness in going so far beyond the borders of law and order, for they were the chief resources of the cattle and horse-thieves. The regulators seldom committed violence upon the cattlemen and mustangers, knowing full well that to do so would be to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

Among the noted characters of Western Texas, and one who for years had kept the people, rancheros and mustangers in a fever of excitement, was the notorious Black Boniface, the leader of a band of outlaws, or regulators, whose retreat was somewhere upon the head-waters of the San Saba river. This man of all others Colonel Miles feared. There were treasures in his party that were not to be measured in value, by dollars and cents—such as he knew Black Boniface would prize beyond the value of gold, and for the possession of which he would let no human life stand in the way should he once set his wicked heart upon obtaining the treasures.

Then there was another person in those parts, the very opposite of Black Boniface in character, though it had not been the colonel's pleasure to meet him. This was Little Texas, the Young Mustanger—a youth made famous by his wonderful horsemanship, his reckless daring, and the use of the lasso—a boy who had sent more wild horses and horned cattle to the markets of Galveston and Austin than any other person in Western Texas. At least, this is what Colonel Miles had been told, but the stories seemed so incredible that he was disposed to make due allowance for the average Texan yarn—particularly those told of the regulator, Black Boniface, and the Young Mustanger.

The few days the party had been waiting in camp by the San Saba had made camp life dull and monotonous. Everybody was anxious to know where his and her home were to be located; and but for the presence of Christie and Edith, the hours would have dragged more wearily than they did. To these girls there was enjoyment in wood, river and bound-

less plain; and to all this was added, by the knowledge of surrounding dangers, a spirit of romantic excitement.

It was the wont of the maidens to walk by the river at evening, and watch the sun go down beyond the great plain stretching away for weary leagues into the west from the opposite shore of the river. Nor did familiarity with the scene dim its glory in the least, for the fourth evening we find them there, seated on a log by the water's edge, watching the declining sun and chatting as only two light-hearted girls can.

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed Christie, enthusiastically, as she saw the blood-red sun sinking behind the horizon, "isn't that delightful? Oh, that beautiful red sky, and that calm ocean of verdure! Why couldn't I have been an artist, and then I could sketch such divine landscapes and—"

Her eyes were bent downward and resting upon a clump of brush upon the water's edge. Edith saw that she had been suddenly startled, transfixed. Her face had become blanched and her eyes distended as if under some horrible fascination. There was a movement of her body as if to recoil from something dreadful, and Edith, imbued with the spirit of silent fear, permitted her own eyes to turn in the direction indicated by Christie's startled gaze. But she could see nothing save a clump of matted brush.

"Christie!" she exclaimed; "what do you see? You are frightened, child."

"Look, Edith!" she answered, pointing downward.

Again Edith glanced at the point indicated, and this time she, too, started; for amid the tangled meshes of the clump of brush she beheld a pair of burning eyes set in a brown, dusky face—a human face peering up into hers.

"It is an Indian, Christie!" exclaimed the calm and thoughtful Edith.

Her words broke the spell that bound the Yab Christie, and starting up the little maiden uttered a scream and started back from the river.

As the maiden's cry of alarm rung out over the water and through the wood, the like form of a Mexican glided out from under the cover of brush, swam rapidly across, and before a single man could reach the spot where the maidens stood, the cunning fellow had gained the opposite shore and disappeared from sight.

Colonel Miles was the first to reach the river, and learn from Edith what had passed. The colonel was retounded. A look of uneasiness settled upon his face and he began pacing the shore with a nervous step.

"The sneaking whelp is skulking around here for no good," he said; "if I could only have put a bullet through his brain it would have nipped his game in the bud. Are you sure it was a Mexican, girl?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure," answered Edith; "he was a small man with dark complexion and hair, and, oh, such murderous black eyes!"

"Boys," the colonel exclaimed, addressing his men, who by this time had joined him at the river, "some of us must cross the river and search for that coyote."

A number of his men volunteered to accompany him, and the party at once crossed the river and began the search. They had no difficulty in finding the trail, but darkness came on before they could overtake the Mexican, and so they returned to camp.

Every point of approach was doubly guarded that night, but, to the happy surprise of all, the long, weary hours of darkness were away without the visitation of dangers. Still they did not permit their vigilance to relax for a moment, and another day and night passed but neither friend or foe came. On the second day, however, the approach of three horsemen was announced, and amid the excitement consequent upon the discovery the strangers rode into camp.

They were dressed and armed as Texan rangers, and bestrode well caparisoned and strong-limbed horses. They had in charge a led horse—a mustang stud of a beautiful cream color—that seemed wild and restive.

Colonel Miles advanced and saluted the trio. The leader of the party responded in a pleasant manner. The latter was a little above medium height and size, straight as an Indian, with a fine physical development, a keen gray eye, a heavy dark mustache, and withal a rather handsome man; but the symmetry and beauty of his face was slightly marred by an ugly red scar running diagonally across his cheek.

His companions were not as attractive and prepossessing characters as he. One was a Mexican and the other a half-breed Indian—both low-browed and sullen-looking fellows not calculated to inspire confidence by their personal appearance.

After the compliments of the day had been passed the white stranger said:

"In passing up the valley the smoke from your camp-fire revealed your presence, and we could not resist the temptation to call and see who was here."

"That was right, gentlemen," replied the colonel, "but whom have we the honor of addressing?"

"My name is Lucas. Lucas—more familiarly known as Captain Lucas. We are mustangers, or, in other words, Texan traders—dealing and trading in horses with the mustangers, or men that make a business of catchin' wild horses."

"Ah, indeed?" exclaimed the colonel.

"We have been down the river," continued Lucas, "after this handsome buck-skin we have here. I learned that it had been caught, and determined upon having it, for it is a remarkable horse."

"I declare he is a noble-looking fellow," said the colonel, looking around the fretful little animal.

"And he's the second horse in speed on Texan soil, I do believe," said Lucas. "The mustangers

have all had their eyes on that Pegasus for years, and tried to catch him, but never until a few days ago did any of them succeed, and then a boy—Little Texas—had the honor of taking him, since which time he has passed through different hands, and at last I purchased him."

"Uncle Israel," said Christie, stealing up to her uncle's side, and speaking in a low tone, "that is the very horse I saw a few days ago pass down the plain at the head of a large herd."

"What, the one you've been talking and dreaming off the one you've been thinking of and wishing for?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied Christie, with a sweet, pleading look.

"Why, child, what could you do with a wild horse? tell me that, will you?" asked the bluff old gentleman.

"Haven't I ridden horses, uncle, that some colonels we know couldn't ride?" the maiden asked, with a roguish smile; "and wasn't I counted the best lady rider in Tennessee? Now, say, uncle."

"I didn't say you weren't, child," the colonel said, yielding to the anxious little heart and pleading eyes of his fair protégée; "but if you do want to get your precious neck broke, I'll buy that pony for you, if it takes the last dollar I've got."

Christie's eyes brightened, and she fairly danced with joy. She clasped her little hands together and looked the feeling she could not express.

Captain Lucas had overheard a part of the conversation between the colonel and his daughter, and embraced the first opportunity to remark:

"Your daughter, I observe, is an admirer of horses."

"Oh, yes, confound it!" blurted the colonel, in his way. "I presume a horse'll be the death of her, yet. Is that fellow for sale, Lucas?"

"We are Texan traders, Mr. Miles, and are making our bread by buying, selling and trading. We'll sell or trade anything we've got. Fifty dollars is our figures on that buck skin."

"Has he been broken to the saddle?" asked Miles.

"He has been thoroughly conquered and broken, sir; we always ride our horses as soon as caught or purchased, and I dare say, your daughter can ride him if she's accustomed to the saddle."

"She rides, sir, like a centaur, sir, like a centaur," said the colonel.

Captain Lucas and his men dismounted.

"Balza," said the trader, addressing the Mexican, "throw the saddle on Pegasus, and ride him."

The Mexican stripped the saddle from his own horse and placed it upon the back of the buck-skin; then he mounted it and rode up and down the river—through the corral, and around the camp. The animal clamped his bits and tossed his head a little at first, but finally came in as gentle as an old horse.

Every man and woman was delighted with the beautiful little mustang, and in less than an hour Christie Miles was its owner, and upon its back. She rode with a side-saddle, and handled the reins with ease and skill, and the noble horse that, but a few days before, ran wild on the broad Texan plain, was now held in thralldom, and guided by the little hand of a feeble girl.

Having disposed of his horse, and satisfied his apparent curiosity, the traders took their departure.

While exercising her new horse, Christie looked about for Edith, but she was nowhere to be seen; so the maiden rode up to the door of her tent and called for her to come out. But there was no response, and Christie was surprised, alarmed. She called to old June, Colonel Miles's negro housekeeper, to come and see if Edith was in her tent.

The old negress waddled down to Edith's apartment and entered; but a moment later she came rushing out, frantic with excitement.

"Oh, Heavenly Father!" she cried; "'for de Lord, Miss Edith an dead—lying on de cold floor' dead! Oh, Lor'! Lor'!"

With a cry of distress and grief, Christie leaped from her horse, and giving Pegasus in care of a servant, ran into Edith's tent.

Then a piercing scream startled the camp. On the floor of her tent lay Edith, to all appearance dead. Her face was bloodless and wore a look of pain. Her hands, the fingers clutched tightly, lay limp by her side.

"Oh, Edith! my poor, dear sister is dead!" cried Christie, falling upon her knees by the prostrate girl and clasping her hand and raising her head. The hand was still warm.

By this time Colonel Miles had reached the tent, and learning the condition of affairs he called the party's physician, Dr. Jeduthan Dover, who came and examined the girl's pulse and heart, and announced that she was far from being dead; but that she "was laboring under the effects of nervous prostration," or words to that effect, and had fallen in a swoon.

Restoratives were at once administered, and it was found that the doctor was right, for signs of returning consciousness were soon manifested. It was some time, however, before she was able to comprehend her situation, and when she did, she glanced quickly and excitedly around her and exclaimed:

"Sister—Christie, where is he? Where is he, Christie?"

"Whom do you mean, Edith? Uncle Miles?" answered Christie, in surprise.

The sound of the latter's voice seemed to restore Edith to full consciousness, and, with a little cry, she exclaimed:

"What are I saying, Christie?"

"You are ill, sister," replied the fair Christie.

Edith glanced at the faces around her with bewildered look and said, in a rather evasive tone:

"No, I have not been well to-day."

In a few minutes all withdrew from her presence

but Christie. As the colonel walked away, a feeling of queer mistrust entered his breast. From Edith's words and actions he was led to infer that there was a secret buried in her heart, and that the trader, Seneca Lucas, had something to do with it. Then as his thoughts went back into the past, he started with a deep-drawn sigh, as one thing occurred to his mind.

Night came and went, and with the coming of day it was found that three horses were missing. Their picket-pins had been drawn, and after some examination of the ground and the trail, it was evident they had been stolen. This discovery caused great excitement in camp, and in a few minutes the impulsive Colonel Miles and four of his friends were mounted and in pursuit of the thieves.

The trail led southward, and was easily followed, as the thieves had taken no pains to conceal it; but after traveling a few miles it was discovered that the villains had separated, each one with a horse going in a different direction. But Colonel Miles was equal to the emergency. He was determined to recover the horses and punish the thieves in such a manner that they would not trouble him again, and so he divided up his party, sending his men upon two of the trails, he taking the third one alone.

All felt satisfied that the thieves would meet again at some appointed place, and it was arranged that the party reaching this point first should await the coming of the others, so that after some further understanding as to the course to be pursued in case they should not meet, the parties separated—each one taking its trail.

The party pursuing the middle trail traveled in a due south-west course, and about noon came to a little creek where, to their surprise they found the three horse-thieves had come together. It was a surprise to them because not expected so soon, and so they dismounted and waited the coming of their friends. In the course of an hour the two on the right came up. Colonel Miles alone was still absent, still they thought nothing of this until hours began to go by and evening approach; then they became uneasy; and fears for his safety were entertained.

"It can't be he's reached this point first, and growing impatient, gone on alone," said Tom Harvey.

"It'd be just like him," replied another, "in case he got sight of the thieves. The colonel has a habit of going off half-cocked."

"At any rate, let us inquire into the matter."

A careful search of the ground was made and, true enough, they found where a fourth horse, unquestionably that of the colonel, had crossed the creek. Following this up they soon came to where the grass was trampled and cut with many hoofs; and here and there were little clots of congealed blood upon the ground, and blood-stains upon the trodden grass.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed young Harvey, "here's millions of proof that there has been a bloody fight here between the thieves and somebody; but whether the colonel's had a hand in it I can't say, but I'm of the opinion, friends, that he has."

Harvey's friends were of the same opinion, and while discussing the probable result of the conflict, and the course they should pursue, night came upon them. They went into camp on the creek, and the next morning made further examination of the battle-ground, and became convinced that there must have been a score of horsemen engaged in the conflict; and if Colonel Miles had been taken prisoner, he was in the hands of a large party against which it would be sheer madness for them to attempt to array themselves; and with this conclusion in regard to the matter, they mounted their horses and started back to camp to lay the case before their friends. As they proceeded along they expressed a hope that they might find the colonel at camp when they arrived there; but they were doomed to a bitter disappointment, for, when they reached the San Saba that day, they found he was not there.

The news that the four men brought to camp cast a shadow of the deepest gloom and sorrow over the hearts of the little band. Christie and Edith were almost distracted by the news, and for a time the camp, that had so recently been filled with laughter, gaiety and pleasure, was now filled with weeping, distress and trouble.

Fearing an attack, now more than ever, from enemies, the camp was strongly fortified, and for two days and nights scarcely a man, woman or child slept, so close and constant was the watch upon all sides. Meanwhile, there were those that still entertained hopes of Colonel Miles's return, and many and fervent were the prayers offered up for his restoration to his friends and almost broken-hearted daughters.

Toward the close of the third day a horseman was seen approaching from the west at a rapid pace. A feeling of hope and joy thrilled through every heart, and with eager anticipation was every eye fixed upon the rider; but bitter was their disappointment when the horseman dashed into camp, for he was an entire stranger!

The stranger was mounted upon a clean-limbed animal whose nostrils were smoking and sides steaming with hard riding. The man himself was a rough, bearded fellow dressed in a suit peculiar to the border-settler, yet the unceremonious manner in which he entered the camp, and the freeness and frankness of his speech at once dissipated all doubts of his character.

As he drew rein before the disappointed group he saluted them, and then, fixing his eyes upon one of the elder gentlemen, said:

"I presume this is the camp of Colonel Israel Miles, arn't it?"

"It is," answered Mr. Boardman; "but what do you know of Colonel Israel Miles, stranger?"

"I have come direct, and fast as this horse'd carry

me, from Colonel Miles's bedside," responded the man."

A cry of joy burst from every lip, for it was joy, indeed, to know that the colonel was, at least, alive; and in a moment the stranger was the central figure of a group of eager, anxious people.

"Where is the colonel? Where is the colonel?" was asked by a number.

"He's about twenty or twenty-five miles, as the crow flies, from here, lying very low with a wound received in a fight with some horse-thieves and desperadoes. I found him lying dead, as I supposed, on the prairie, but when I discovered he wasn't quite dead I took him home with me and gave him some brandy and herb-tea and brought him back to life, and he may weather through if he has the right kind of treatment—better'n I am able to give him. What he needs is some medicines and a good nurse, and so he sent me over here for Doctor Dover and his daughter Christie to come over and treat him till he's able to be moved, which may be in a week and maybe not for a solid month."

A little cry escaped Christie's lips—a cry of mingled joy and grief—as the stranger concluded his story. It was joy to her to learn that her guardian was alive, and grief to learn that he was so low and suffering for the want of care. In an eager, excited voice she declared her readiness to go at once to his bedside, and even turned and ordered a servant to bring the saddle and saddle Pegasus, the beautiful buck-skin mustang purchased of Seneca Lucas, the Texan trader.

Doctor Jeduthan Dover, an odd old gentleman, who was cross as a bear half his time, never seemed in better spirits than when he heard Miles was living and had sent for him. He flew around like a school-boy, ordered his horse, dressed himself for the journey and with his pig-bags on his arm was soon ready to start.

Of course, no one objected, under the circumstances, to Christie going with the stranger so long as Dr. Dover was going with them; and as there could be no doubt of the truthfulness of the man's story the two were soon mounted and on their way.

Many were the kind regards and hopes sent to the colonel, and as the three rode out of camp many were the hearty "God-speed-yous" that followed them.

Those at camp watched the trio until the distance and gathering twilight shadows shut them from view; then they returned to their camp-fires and tents to discuss the situation and brood over the first misfortune that had befallen them in that ideal land of promise.

The ranger, who gave his name as Victor Ure, and Christie rode together. Dr. Dover rode behind. He was just that kind of a man that would have ridden behind and alone, even had there been another lady in the party. Ure and Christie conversed freely. The maiden asked many questions concerning her uncle which were answered in a pleasant, obliging manner.

They rode on a brisk gallop. Victor Ure watched the sun go down and the moon come up as if measuring the moments thereby.

Their course lay over a broad expanse of prairie, broken only by an occasional clump of trees that rose up like a grim sentinel against the western sky, or crouched low in the valley like a murderous assassin. The grass was thick and luxuriant, and rustled under the horses' feet. Flowers of a thousand colors bloomed on the plain and distilled their rich perfume on the balmy air. The moon, bright almost as day, flooded the plain with a mellow light. Over and around them all was a dead hush that was broken only by the grass-muffled strokes of their animals' feet.

Straight as an Indian and firm as a centaur the bearded ranger sat his horse; and, with the ease and grace of a fairy-queen, the pretty, patient Christie Miles rode at his side upon her spirited mustang, while on, a few rods behind, came the doctor at a heavy, lumbering gait.

Deep in the solitude of the great plain and under the shadows of night, with thoughts of what Victor Ure might be, Christie shuddered. The dread loneliness of the surrounding impressed her spirit with vague and gloomy forebodings, and a strange dread and anxiety came over her and made her feel as though the presence of the gruff but kind-hearted old doctor would afford her relief. And with this feeling preying upon her, she looked back, and to her surprise saw that the distance between the doctor and them was widening.

"I'm afraid the doctor's horse will not hold out if we ride so fast, Mr. Ure," she said.

"He will certainly tell us if he finds his horse failing," the ranger replied.

"It would be just like him to say nothing even were it well to speak. The doctor is a very peculiar man."

"I assure you, Miss Miles, he will not lose sight of us."

But this did not satisfy that uneasiness gnawing at the maiden's heart; however, she made no reply.

On they went—the bearded ranger and the lovely girl, and on behind came the doctor.

Mile after mile was traversed. The moon sailed aloft, and the shadows that had swept along at the riders' sides now crept behind.

Conscious of the fact that each moment brought her nearer and nearer her beloved guardian, Christie did not permit her spirit to give way under the feeling that weighed upon her mind, but endeavored to cheer up and be ready to meet her uncle with a smiling face and light heart.

As they rode on Vic or Ure became less communicative, and urged their animals to a faster speed; and now and then he glanced before and around him with his keen eyes, and ever and anon he look-

ed back over his shoulder as if looking for the doctor. He seemed uneasy, and Christy did not fail to notice it; nor did it give her any cheer or comfort.

The maiden did not look back, but now and then she inquired about the doctor, and always received the assurance that he was in sight—still holding his ground. But in this Victor Ure lied, for at every rod he and Christy had been gaining upon Dover for over two miles, and finally the intervening distance shut the doctor entirely from view.

Dover saw that they were gaining upon him, and called to them to wait when he saw them fading from his view; but they heard him not. Still he urged on his beast, but it was no match for the wiry mustangs, and finally the two melted from his sight. The doctor now began to despair. He knew nothing of the country, nor no more where he wanted to go than the man in the moon. He looked around for a star or landmark by which he could keep his present course. A little motte of tall trees arrested his attention. It was not far away, and as he approached it a horseman glided from out its shadows and drew rein before him.

Dr. Dover saw that it was neither of his friends, and before he could rein in his horse he found himself at the stranger's side.

"Halt, there!" demanded the unknown, in a voice not calculated to inspire terror in a breast like Dover's.

"Well, now I'm halted, confound you! what do you want?" and the crusty old doctor, gazing down upon the stranger, saw a youthful figure dressed in buckskin, and a boyish face looking up at him from under the brim of a sombrero. He was mounted upon a dark-colored mustang, and carried, at the bow of his heavy Mexican saddle, a revolver and a lasso.

"I just want to know what ole cross bear you are, and where you're going?" was the youth's rejoinder.

"It's none of your business who I am," blurted Dover; "but I am trying to follow a man and girl to the ranch of the former, but, bless my eyes, if the rascals haven't outridden me. Have you seen anything of them, baby-face?"

"Hah! hah! hah!" laughed the youth in the doctor's face.

"What the de'il ails you?" stormed Dover, furiously; "are you a wandering Bedlamite?"

"Not at all, old pie-crust; but whom were you folerin', do you suppose?" asked the boy.

"Victor Ure and Christie Miles, that's who! We're going to the man's ranch, where a friend lies sick—wounded. He sent Ure after us."

"And Victor Ure and the maiden have outridden you?"

"Yes," short and crustily.

"It's well; the gait of your horse has no doubt saved your life."

"What do you mean, you little night-hawk, you?"

"I mean that man Victor Ure's made a pack of fools of you. Why, sir, he's the worst outlaw and freebooter in all Texas. He's a man with a dozen faces. He's Black Boniface."

"I don't believe it—I don't believe a word of it!"

"It's true, nevertheless," was the cool rejoinder.

"Boy, do you know what you say is true?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the doctor; "what in the world will I do, then? Say, can you tell me, boy?"

"Yes; go back to your friends and tell them what fools you've all been, and I'll follow Black Boniface."

"You'll follow Black Boniface? Heavens and hurricanes! what a large little critter you are! Who are you, anyhow?"

"I am Little Texas, the Boy Mustang," the lad responded, and then turning his horse's head, dashed away over the moonlit plain on the trail of Black Boniface.

CHAPTER III.

TWICE LASSOED.

ON rode Victor Ure and Christie Miles. Higher in the heavens sailed the big round moon. The hard-riden horses showed no signs of fatigue, nor did a word of complaint escape the lips of the riders.

To Christie it seemed that they had been hours upon the way and that they must be nearing their destination. Inwardly she prayed that such might be the case, for her companion, hitherto so polite and congenial, had grown silent and sullen. She no longer asked him questions, but finally, when desirous of knowing where Dr. Dover was, she turned her head and looked back; but she saw nothing of her friend.

"Mr. Ure," she exclaimed, no longer able to restrain her emotions, "where is Dr. Dover? I cannot see him."

"We left him far behind an hour ago," was the cool response.

"But you have told me all along he was in sight," said Christie.

"Well, but I lied."

Christie was startled by the cold, bitter tone in which the man spoke. A shudder passed over her, and she grew sick at heart; but mustering her courage she asked:

"Will he be able to find the way, do you think?"

"It don't make a bit of difference whether he does or not, Miss Miles," he answered.

"Mr. Ure, why do you speak thus? Have I offended you?" the maiden asked, with a trembling voice.

"Not at all, my little darling," the ranger replied, in a sinister voice. "The fact is, and the truth may as well be told now, I've been lying like an Arab to you all along; my name is not Victor Ure, but in short is Black Boniface."

A cry burst from the maiden's lips, and but for the

hand of the man at her side she would have fallen from her seat.

"But don't take on now, little lady, or I shall be under the necessity of taking you in my arms. I know it is mean in me to deceive you, but then it can't be helped. It is your friends and not you that I consider the worst deceived."

Christie burst into tears, but when she heard the villain gloating like a fiend over his exploit in getting her into his power, her fear and terror turned to hatred and scorn. The gentle spirit of the beautiful, confiding girl was transformed into one of defiance. Her very soul revolted at the thought of the man's consummate treachery and deception. But what could she do, after all? The villain had already taken the hitch-rein of her bridle, and he now controlled her pony. To leap from her saddle was her only chance of escape, and even this must be done at the risk of her life, but she resolved on attempting it when she saw all other chances of escape were gone. But after thinking the matter over it occurred to her that such an act would afford her no relief, should she escape death, for the villain could easily follow her up. She was helpless and riding into the den of the infamous Black Boniface.

Many were the thoughts that flashed through the poor girl's brain as they galloped on, but none of them brought the least cheer or consolation to her breast. Could she have been certain that Colonel Miles was living, it would have afforded her a spark of hope, but since she found that Victor Ure had been deceiving her in regard to the illness of her uncle, she felt satisfied that he was dead, and that the man at her side had slain him.

Deep in the solitude of the great plain Black Boniface felt safe with his captive, and surrounded by the shadows of night he believed he was hidden from all human eyes, but in the very hour of his triumph, his self-assured safety, a rider dashed out from the darkness that hung over the distance and bore down toward him—turning his triumph into fear.

With a muttered oath the villain urged on the two horses at renewed speed. By his fears his captive took courage.

Like the wind they sped down the prairie, and on, closer and closer behind, came the unknown pursuer. Boniface drew his revolver, for he saw he would soon be overtaken.

"Halt! halt, there!" suddenly rung out from behind.

Boniface turned in his saddle and raised his revolver and fired. A mocking laugh and the "whiz" of bullets answered him, and the villain saw he was in danger. But again he turned and fired and again was his shot answered by one from his pursuer.

In this manner a running fight was kept up until the outlaw's horse received a bullet in the leg and fell. As the animal went down Boniface endeavored to land upon his feet, but his stirrup threw him, and holding on to the rein of Christie's horse the bits were torn from its mouth.

Alarmed by the report of the pistols, and finding itself uncurbed by the iron bits, the animal plunged madly away over the plain with his fair young rider.

Christie saw her danger in a moment. She had escaped from the outlaw, but was a prisoner in the saddle! She could no longer control her horse, and a dreadful fear seized upon her, but in the midst of all she heard a voice shouting words of cheer and encouragement to her. The voice came from behind. It was a strange voice. Her heart took courage. She listened intently for she dare not look back. She heard the sound of pursuing hoofs close behind.

"Stick to your saddle, girl," the unknown again called out, "and I will save you!"

The next instant something shot past her head with a "skirring" sound, and struck the outstretched head of her pony. It was a lasso, and true to its aim, the noose settled about the animal's neck, and was gradually drawn taut.

This was the last that Christie remembered of her wild ride for some time. She fainted, and when she again recovered consciousness she lay upon the moonlit prairie, while over her was bending the form of a boy. Hard by stood her own pony and that of her rescuer.

"You are feeling better, now, are you not?" was the boy's query, as she gazed up into his face; "don't be afraid of me," he went on, "for I'm your friend. I am Little Texas."

"You Little Texas, the Boy Mustang?" the astonished girl exclaimed, rising to a sitting posture, and then to her feet.

"That's who I am, miss; and I'm yours now to command. Oh, but I did cheat old Boniface out of an angel, sure! But there's no tellin' how soon he'll be upon us again, for I didn't have time to stop and kill him. Come, I have your mustang in charge. Let us mount and be off. I will see you safe with your friends, wherever they may be."

He had put his own bridle upon Christie's horse, and assisting her to the mustang's back, he mounted his own animal and the two rode away.

In a few words Christie told the story of her night's adventure with Victor Ure, prefacing the same with an account of Colonel Miles's absence and the visit of the villain Ure. She placed implicit confidence in the gallant Young Mustang. She saw that the seal of a brave and noble heart was set upon the brow of the youth.

The two rode along for an hour or more, conversing in a free, familiar way, when they finally entered a belt of heavy timber where the darkness was intense.

"Is this the San Sala timber, Little Texas?" Christie asked.

"No, no, little girl," the boy responded; "we are

a long ways from the San Saba. This is the Llano timber, and my cabin is not far from here. I hope you will forgive me for playin' the Victor Ure in not tellin' you sooner where I was takin' you. But my intentions are good. I want you to have rest and food, for the San Saba is far from here. To-morrow I will take you to your friends; in fact, I will take you now, if you say so."

"You know what is best, Texas; I will trust to your judgment."

And so they rode on until they entered a dark trail that wound through the valley, and in a short time drew up before a low, wide cabin sitting under the sullen brow of a bluff.

Leaping to the ground Little Texas assisted Christie to dismount, then hitching the horses, he conducted the maiden to the cabin, pulled the latch-string and threw open the door. But a cry of surprise and horror burst from his lips as he did so, for the light of a fire burning on the hearth flashed into his face, and in that light, seated upon the floor and reclining in attitudes of ease and repose, were Dr. Jules Rocheford and a dozen more of Black Boniface's freebooters!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOOD SAMARITANS.

WE will now go back and look after Colonel Miles whom we left in a previous chapter in pursuit of the horse-thieves. After leaving his four companions he pushed on rapidly, for the trail was fresh and plain.

Colonel Miles was naturally of a quick, impulsive nature, easily thrown off his balance by excitement, and as he hurried forward, eager to recover his horses and punish the thieves, he never once took into consideration the risk he was running. The result of this impetuous haste was that he came suddenly upon the thieves with his horses in a little valley, and, without a second thought, he drew his revolver and charged upon them, demanding their surrender.

Not knowing but a dozen friends were at the colonel's back, the outlaws leaped into their saddles and attempted to escape. But in an instant the colonel was upon them. At the first shot a robber fell dead, then followed several other shots and another horse-thief bit the dust; but before the brave man could serve the third in like manner the thief dashed up behind him and dealt him—the colonel—a blow upon the head that partially stunned him. Mile's horse dashed away, the colonel fell from the saddle and was dragged some distance with his foot fast in the stirrup. By a desperate effort he succeeded in freeing himself from this danger, and then all became blank to him—total oblivion. Nature had been overdone and he fainted, and how long he remained so he knew not; but when he had fully recovered his senses the first thing of which he became conscious was the sound of voices—voices that seemed far away and sounded like the distant murmur of water—like the voices we hear in a dream; then the outlines of a woman appeared before him—the walls of a room with strange pictures and devices upon it; and doors and windows were gradually unfolded from the dimness of his confused brain; and at length he had so far recovered as to be able to comprehend his situation; he was lying in a room upon a soft bed. He was weak and suffering from a severe pain and a raging fever.

Closing his eyes the colonel collected his bewildered thoughts. One by one he recalled the events of the past—his fight with the outlaws, the blow upon the head, the flight of his horse with him dragging in the stirrup and the shouts of men and the din of conflict. All these things were clear enough to him, and forced upon him the conviction that he was in the power of his enemies. The thought caused him to start. He opened his eyes and gazed around him. He saw that the room he occupied was well and tastefully furnished, and wore an air of neatness and comfort that only the deft fingers of a woman can impart to the arrangements of a house. Near the head of the bed stood a small table, and upon this was a number of bottles, a water-pitcher and some clean linen. The woman watching by his bedside was a negress. He fixed his eyes upon her with such a strange, bewildered look that she became frightened, started up and uttered a little scream.

Instantly a voice with a slightly foreign accent called out from an adjoining room:

"What is the matter, Hegar?"

"Oh, missus!" replied the negress, "de sick gentleman's opened his eyes and he's lookin' so awful wild—jist like ole Mars Gray did when he died. Fore de good Lord, Miss Nita, I fear dis man's gwine to die!"

A young woman, tall and slender, with dark hair and eyes entered the room, and advanced with a soft step to the bedside and looked upon the sick man. A light of tenderness and anxiety was beaming upon her wondrous face that seemed to infuse new life into the colonel's body. Her dark, lustrous eyes seemed to look down into his soul with the holy serenity of a guardian angel. There were a few moments' silence; the woman was the first to speak.

"You are better, senor," she said. The sound of her voice broke the spell that hung upon the colonel's lips. He replied in a feeble voice—the first time he had spoken since the day of the conflict on the prairie.

"I do not know—I am confused, weak."

"You have passed through a trying ordeal, senor," the dark-eyed maiden said; "you have been near death's door, but careful nursing has brought you back to life."

"But where am I, and how came I here?" the colonel asked.

"You are in the house of friends," she answered;

"my brother found you on the prairie where the regulators beat you down."

"In God's name, who is your brother that has saved my life?" Miles exclaimed, starting up and resting his elbow upon the bed, while he fixed his hollow eyes upon the shrinking girl.

"Senor Juan de Rossevan," she answered, frightened by the colonel's bluff, excited manner of speech. "You are Spaniards, then," the invalid said, in a ricker tone, and with an air of resignation; "but I hope to Jehovah that I am not in Spain."

The maiden smiled, and advancing to the window, she drew back the curtain so the sick man could see out, and said:

"You are in Texas, senor."

"In the San Saba valley?"

"No, senor; you are many leagues from the San Saba."

"Well, where in the plague am I?" persisted the remorseless, inconsistent sick man.

"You are with those who have befriended you, senor. More than this I am not at liberty to tell you," the maiden answered.

"Consolation," muttered the ungrateful man, laying his head back upon the pillow and closing his eyes; then continuing in a mental strain: "why isn't she at liberty to tell me more? Can it be that regulators have befriended me, and that I am in the strong hold of Black Boniface?"

He must have given expression to his thoughts in words or else the maiden divined them, for she continued:

"I assure you, senor, you will never have cause to regret being in my brother's house and care."

The colonel started, and a pang of regret actually touched his heart, for he supposed he had spoken angrily and offended the fair creature at his side.

"Oh, botheration," he said, endeavoring to apologize, "you must not get mad at me, Miss de Rossevan, for I'm an old rattlepate, and don't know what I am saying."

"You have not offended me, I assure you, senor," she answered.

"Oh! well, pardon me; but how long have I been here?" he demanded, somewhat confused.

"You came yesterday, or were brought rather," she responded. "You were very low, senor—you had bled much."

"Yes, I must have been; but, oh, what will my friends—my children—my daughters do? They'll return me as dead. Oh! I must go back to my friends!"

"The doctor was here an hour or so since," the maiden continued, "and he said you must not leave for many days yet. If you have friends far or near—over in the San Saba—brother will send for them when he comes."

"Where is your brother, miss?"

"He is out riding, but will be here soon. I am looking for him every minute," the girl replied.

Thus the two conversed for several minutes when the maiden finally excused herself and went out. The old negress took her place by the colonel's bedside. She administered some medicine to him and then sat down and began crooning to herself like a cat purring in the chimney-corner. The colonel closed his eyes and gave way to his reflections. So far as the people with whom he was lodging were concerned, he felt satisfied that they were true and honest friends; but, despite his resolute spirit and great physical powers, he was forced to admit that he was in a critical condition, and that it would take days and perhaps weeks to recover his wonted strength, for no one knew how near death's door the colonel was better than the colonel did himself.

While reflecting upon his condition the sick man sunk into a doze; and in this half-conscious state he began to talk aloud over his situation.

"A bad beginning in Texas," he muttered; "and there's no telling when and where it will end. Oh, my poor girls! if they were only here now. Ah! wouldn't the musical ring of little Christie's voice be a strengthening cordial, a balm of Gilead to my weak body and mind? I shall send for one of them to come and nurse me. Her presence will be better than medicine. Kind, gentle Edith, poor girl, will be better for the sick-room than light-hearted little Christie. I shall send for Edith, and—"

A cool, soft hand was laid upon his feverish brow. He started, opened his eyes and gazed around him.

A stranger was standing by his bedside—a man whose face, magnificent form and brilliant attire were suggestive of a Spanish prince of the olden time. As the eyes of the two men met, Miles exclaimed:

"Ah! you, sir, are Don Juan de Rossevan."

"Yes, senor," was the reply of the young cavalier, and drawing up a chair he sat down by the colonel's bedside.

CHAPTER V.

DR. DOVER AND OLD MORALITY MEET.

We left Dr. Dover in the depths of the night and the solitude of the prairie, untried by Christie Miles and her escort, Victor Ure; and when met by the Boy Mustanger, Little Texas, and informed that Black Boniface was the maiden's escort, and advised to return to the San Saba, the doctor flew into a violent passion, and even when Little Texas had turned and disappeared in pursuit of the outlaw and villain, the man of pills and powders sat upon his horse and swore and raved like a madman. And when he was thus deporting himself, he was not aware of the approach of another horseman behind him, until a sharp voice called out:

"By the howling blasts of desolation, and the hissing of a red-hot iron, what old pizen pirate can you be?"

Quick as a flash the doctor whirled in his saddle, drew his pistol and fired into the air in his excitement.

"Halt! who comes there? Curse your pistols, I'll prescribe—I'll dose your carcass if you come nigh me!"

"Easy, ole rantankerous!" was the cool response; "don't stir your liver into sich a rage! The air smells o' brimstone, now, with your sizzlin' profanity."

"You're an infernal scamp, and I—"

"I'm not; my name is Morality, Old Morality," interrupted the ranger.

"Old Rascality!" hissed the doctor, scornfully; "I believe you are Black Boniface's rear-guard, and I've a plagued notion to shoot you!"

"Well, shootin', my amiable ole snappin'-turtle, is a game at which two can play," retorted Old Morality, raising his revolver; "and now, sir knight of the sour liver, if you want to shoot, jist crack in. I'm ready."

"Hold on, you cussed fool!" exclaimed the doctor, sliding from his saddle and taking refuge behind his horse; "hold on, I'm not going to shoot you!"

"Oh, you arn't?" exclaimed the old man, lowering his weapon.

"No, but, please the saints in glory, I'd like to."

Old Morality burst into a peal of laughter that rung out wild and strange upon the night.

"Old man," he replied, "if you have any desire to shoot with me, I'll give you your own distance, and try you a peg."

"I don't want to shoot; I don't want to waste lead on your carcass."

"You don't want to talk so sassy do you, ole puddin'-head?" the ranger replied; "I allers make it a rule to knock the stuffin' out of barkin' dogs."

"Oh, Judea!" screamed the doctor, blind with his rage; "it'd do me good to dissect your carcass. Say, do you know who I am, man? I, sir, am Jeduthan Dover, M. D., late of Grassville, Tennessee."

"And I, sir, as I said before, am Old Morality, late from a den of human tigers, from whom I recaptured these horses."

"By the scales of justice!" exclaimed Dover, "I thought you were out of some animal's den; but by your braying I supposed, all along, you were a specimen of the genus jackass."

"Come, now, doctor, you don't want to fling metaphysics at me, but you want to talk square. We can't fford to be enemies, when we're in need of friends so bad; besides, I don't want to quarrel with as nice ole lady as you are."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the doctor, sarcastically. "I thought you'd tumble from your Pegasus steed of bombast and bluster," and the old man ventured from his retreat behind his horse. "Now," he continued, "if you've anything to say, come out like a white man and say it."

"Wal, doctor, I'll admit I've taken a little advantage of you, but then, I'll make that all right," replied Morality; "now, the fact is there's an abundance of danger on this prairie, and you and me are not so numerous as to be divided in our forces. Now, Dr. Dover, honest bright, you can freeze to me—you can count on me till the cows come home."

"Then, sir," replied the doctor, climbing into his saddle, "if you are such an icicle—such a true friend, just put me on my way to camp."

"Wal, whar ye goin' to? Santa Fe? City of Mexico? or to California?"

"No; I'm going to camp over on the San Saba river—in Cedar Grove," responded Dover.

"Whew!" ejaculated Old Morality; "away up there?"

"Yes, away—up—there."

"Where've you been?"

"Trying to follow a man and girl that went south awhile ago; but I guess I'll give it up."

"I would if I was you, Doc, for I presume they're ten miles from here by this time. If anybody can catch 'em, that little hurricane of a Little Texas can do it."

"Then that w s Little Texas, was it?"

"Yes, it war, Doc."

"He said so, but every man I've met to date in Texas is such a caustic liar that I s'posed they began to practice when young, and so doubted the boy's word at the time," replied Dover. "He also said the man with our girl, Christie, was Black Boniface."

"Then it was so, if Texas said so, rest easy on that; and if any man in the South-west can catch that villain, the Boy Mustanger's the lark."

"Then I can go back to camp with some peace of mind," said Dover; "so lead the way, Old Morality."

The old ranger turned his horse's head northward and rode away, the doctor following him, though not without some doubt and uncertainty, for, since he had been deceived by one stranger, it was very natural that he should suspect another; and as they rode along he kept his hand upon his revolver, and his eye upon the ranger. But despite his suspicions and reticence, Old Morality's tongue ran incessantly, and his odd expressions, his exciting stories and pleasant anecdotes, finally drove all fears and doubts from the doctor's breast and drew him into his confidence, making their ride together a very pleasant one. In fact, the time passed so rapidly in the old ranger's company that daylight was upon them ere the doctor was aware that it was anywhere near morning; and the sun was scarcely an hour high when they rode into camp on the San Saba.

The return of Dover so soon caused no little excitement in camp. No one had a doubt, when he rode up, but that he had been to the colonel's bedside, and so all were very anxious to hear how their old friend was, and they gathered about the doctor, plying him with a dozen questions.

"I am sorry to say, M. friends," Dover said, as he

dismounted, "that I have not seen Colonel Miles, nor do I know where he is."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed a dozen men, in a breath.

"It's a gospel fact, men," continued the doctor; "we were a set of blind fools. That man, Victor Ure, was none other under God's heavens than Black Boniface, and he got away with Christie in spite of me!"

The settlers were horrified by this startling intelligence, and for awhile the greatest excitement prevailed. A new sorrow was added to the hearts of the little band; another cloud overshadowed its hopes and happiness.

"Little Texas is after Boniface," put in Old Morality, reassuringly, when Dover had concluded his story; "and I tell you folks he is a little screamer from Yorktown. If that's anything on Texas side that can throw dirt in Bonny's face it's that young gallinipper. That's not a man on these peraross that can hold a candle to him throwin' a lasso. Thunder! they say it's a positive fact that he can ride a thunderbolt or catch chained lightning with a lasso, and I believe it—every word of it."

But whatever the old man believed the emigrants had little faith in, and, in the moment of their great sorrow, his ideas failed to impress them very favorably, or his words to inspire them with hope or confidence.

The doctor and Old Morality were provided with breakfast, after which they were given a tent and bed, and laid down to rest and obtain a few hours' sleep for the night's journey and privations had weighed heavily upon the old men.

While they were still asleep the camp was again thrown into some little excitement by the appearance of a party, or cavalcade, on the plain below camp. As it drew nearer all saw that it was a coach, or covered carriage, drawn by four horses and followed by six or eight horsemen. Our friends were puzzled to know what it meant. A carriage of that description seemed entirely out of place upon that Texan prairie. It looked like a royal turnout. Polished weapons, caparisons and brilliant uniforms flashed in the sunlight.

With no little curiosity and impatience the approach of the party was awaited.

In a few minutes the vehicle sped down the prairie, turned into the woods and came to a halt on the margin of the camp.

The vehicle was an ancient-looking and clumsy affair, upon whose panels was embossed in gold the coat-of-arms of some Spanish house of nobility. It was closed with curtains drawn, and as the driver, who was seated in a box on top, drew rein, a footman leaped to the ground and threw open one of the doors.

The mounted escort, as well as the driver and footman, were men of Spanish blood, dressed in their national garb, armed with swords and pistols and mounted upon fine blooded horses; and as the footman descended from the box these men drew their swords and held them before their faces.

Then from the coach leaped a man who caused a little cry of surprise to escape the lips of the settlers.

It was the Spanish recluse, Don Juan de Rossevan, under whose roof Colonel Israel Miles had found shelter and kind treatment. He was dressed in purple and gold. A long serape of fine blue cloth lined with crimson silk and embroidered with gold was around his shoulders. A broad-brimmed sombrero, banded with woven threads of silver and gold, was upon his head. A small sword with jeweled hilt hung at his girdle. Altogether this stranger presented an array of princely wealth and royal blood. He was young—not over eight-and-twenty—tall and straight as an arrow. His hair, which was worn long, was black as the raven's wing, as was, also, his heavy pointed mustache and chin whiskers. Blacker eyes were never set in human head, nor did an eagle ever flash a keener eye from the clouds above than the eyes of Juan de Rossevan.

Glancing around him the Spaniard removed a jeweled glove, and, with a wave of the hand, saluted the emigrants. Raymond Byrd, as spokesman for the party, advanced and returned the stranger's salutation.

"Pardon me, senor," de Rossevan said, "but is this not the camp of Colonel Israel Miles?"

"Yes, sir, it is," responded Byrd, his heart fluttering with eager anticipation as he saw the stranger take a white envelope from his pocket and read the direction upon it.

"Here," said the visitor, "is a letter from Colonel Miles to his daughters, Edith and Christie."

An exclamation of joy burst from the party, and Edith, who had been well-nigh prostrated with her sorrow, ran forward and received the letter from the handsome stranger.

"Oh, it is his!" she exclaimed, as she recognized the handwriting upon the envelope.

There were those in the party who were reserved in their feelings, for they could not help thinking of the deception of Victor Ure, and thought it possible that this man might be plotting to get Edith into his power.

"Then you, stranger," said Byrd, "have met the colonel?"

"I have, senor; he is a guest in my house. I took him there nearer dead than alive. He is slowly recovering from painful wounds inflicted upon him by a party of horse-thieves whom he had the rash courage to attack. The letter will state the object of my visit here."

"MY DEAR GIRLS: You have no doubt wondered what kept me from camp, and perhaps mourned me as lost—dead. But thanks to a kind Providence, and Don Juan de Rossevan, the great-hearted Spanish gentleman who bears this letter to you, I am still

permitted to live; but, my dear girls, I am suffering—of wounds received in a conflict with the heinous wretches that stole our horses. I hope the other boys got back safe. I am very low and feeble from loss of blood; and it will be some time before I will be able to be moved. I am treated here with all the kindness and tenderness that human hearts and human hands could bestow upon a stranger, but still I want one, or both of my adopted daughters with me. I know your presence will be good medicine for me, and so come without delay. The gentleman who brings you this will escort you here. To this man I owe my life. He and his body-guard rescued me from death, and I trust him with all the faithfulness of my heart. I know you will enjoy his company, and then he has a sister here. Her name is Anita, and she is almost as pretty and charming as my Edith and Christie. Tell the boys it can't be helped, but to keep an unceasing vigil upon all sides. I remain Yours affectionately,

"ISRAEL P. MILES."

Edith's heart was all aflutter and her hand trembling when she concluded the letter. She was rejoiced to know that her guardian lived, and yet the fate of Christie weighed upon her a terrible burden of grief. Other thoughts flashed through her mind. The man Victor Ure had come with the very same story, and he had decoyed Christie into his power. Might not this man be a villain, also? As to this, she could not say, but as to Victor Ure, she knew he was a villain! She looked at the Spaniard—their eyes met. He had a noble countenance—not the countenance of a villain. Moreover the letter corroborated this, for she knew it was a genuine letter—written by the hand of her guardian. Of this she had not a single doubt, and all knew the colonel well enough to know that the most cruel torture-rack ever devised by man could not compel him to write such a letter in the interest of a villain.

Edith, however, to make assurance doubly sure, passed the letter to her friends for examination; and all pronounced it genuine, leaving no doubt in Edith's mind but that the stranger was an honest man. Advancing to where the Spaniard stood with uncovered head, the maiden said:

"Mr. Rossevan, I am rejoiced to hear from my dear guardian, but oh! I have such a sad story to tell to his ears. Yesterday, a man calling himself Victor Ure, came here in great haste, saying Colonel Miles was lying in his cabin very low from the effect of wounds received in conflict with robbers, and wanted my sister Christie and Dr. Dover to come to him at once. Never suspecting anything wrong, they mounted their horses and started. That man was Black Boniface, and Christie is still in his power."

"Ah, que desgracia!" cried De Rossevan, in his native tongue, "your sister in the hands of Black Boniface, senorita?"

"Yes, sir," replied Edith, struggling hard to keep back her tears.

"Ah, Dios!" he exclaimed, shaking his head sadly. "It will kill the father to hear this; moreover, you will hesitate to go with me, senorita."

"You do not come as a decoy, nor look like a villain, sir," Edith replied.

"Gracias, senorita," the gentleman responded, with a polite bow; "your father is a most excellent gentleman, and I am desirous of his speedy recovery, and if your friends have any doubt as to my character, I am willing to remain a hostage here until any one whom you may elect can go to the colonel for proof."

"No, sir, I do not doubt you," cried Edith, "and I shall go with you to my guardian."

"It will afford me pleasure, then, to offer you a seat in my cales," Rossevan said.

"Then I will prepare for the journey at once," the maiden replied, and turning she sought her own tent to get ready.

Meanwhile, Juan de Rossevan and the emigrants engaged in conversation.

"How far, Mr. de Rossevan, do you live from here?" asked Mr. Byrd.

"Perhaps thirty miles west, senor, on a tributary of the San Saba river," responded the Spaniard.

"Have you much of a settlement over that way?" asked another.

"No, senor; I am there alone with friends and my servants."

"I should think Black Boniface and the Indians 'd give you bark out there," observed an old wagoner.

"I am troubled some with ladrones, senor, as might be expected."

In the course of half an hour Edith Clayton made her appearance ready for the journey. A look of admiration passed over the handsome, dark face of Don Rossevan, for in her traveling attire she looked never so fair and beautiful, notwithstanding the sorrow that had left its imprint upon her heart and face.

Taking the arm of Don Rossevan she was conducted to the calesa, and given a seat therein, and when her escort had taken a seat with her, the emigrants gathered around the vehicle and bid her good-by and wished her a safe and happy journey.

When the "good-byes" had all been said, Edith informed Rossevan that she was ready to start, when, at a signal, the footman closed the door of the calesa, mounted the box, and then the vehicle rolled away at a rapid rate, followed by the mounted escort.

Despite the good impression that Don Rossevan's appearance, as well as the colonel's letter, had made upon the minds of the settlers, misgivings rose in their hearts as they watched the calesa disappear in the distance. And the more they talked and brooded over the matter the more unsettled and unsatisfactory their peace of mind became, although they had ample assurance that Colonel Miles was alive, and

notwithstanding the fact that Don Rossevan had offered to remain a hostage in camp until they could settle all doubts as to his character.

But leaving the folks on the San Saba for the time being, we will follow Edith and her escort. The calesa was driven rapidly over the plain, and although the way was rough, the heavy springs gave the vehicle an easy, swaying motion to which Edith soon became accustomed.

Juan de Rossevan watched and studied the features of the fair young woman before him with a look of thoughtful admiration. He saw that her troubles were weighing heavily upon her young heart, and that she manifested some embarrassment which he attributed to the situation in which she now found herself; but with all the tact of which he was possessed, he endeavored to comfort and cheer her spirit, and to make her feel that he was in her presence, and not she in his. He could read her young heart in her fair face and soulful eyes; and he saw that that heart was possessed of all that was pure and beautiful in woman. The man was astonished. His heart had been impervious to the charms of woman's face and wiles through all his manhood years. But there was something in Edith besides her face that he admired. It was her soul.

In the course of a few hours they had forded two rivers, plunged across a number of small ravines, wound and twisted through a long, wooded valley, and finally debouched into a broad, open plain. Here Rossevan threw open both doors of the calesa that they might enjoy the scene surrounding them, and drink in the perfumed air.

An ocean of green luxuriant grass waved around them, and above this carpet of verdure thousands of wild flowers of every hue and odor thrust their modest faces and distilled their sweetness on the soft south wind. Of the prairie, of the verdure of the flowers, Don Rossevan talked in strains of eloquence that filled Edith's soul with a sense of unbounded delight. She gazed out upon the plain with a feeling of joy and admiration that she had never felt before, and as she regarded it thus, the words of her companion did more toward awakening in her heart a sense of enthusiasm, than in unfolding the poetical grandeur of nature, than the scene itself, for he painted the soul—not the form.

"Nature," he went on, "has not only expended with a lavish hand upon the material—the outward beauties of this grand country, but she has inspired it with a spirit of grandeur; and that spirit—invisible soul—permeates the atmosphere until we not only see but feel the beauties of Nature. No one with a true soul can gaze upon that landscape without feeling a sense of delight and exultation swelling within his breast. One can scarcely believe that this is a land of ruins, of crime—the home of ladrones and wild men. God intended it for a Paradise, and to me it is a Paradise, a refuge, and a land of promise."

"Then the outlaws and Indians do not molest you?" Edith remarked.

"To some extent, senorita; they have stolen some of my horses and cattle, and killed some of my servants. Of late, however, I have seen no heard of Black Boniface and his regulators, and I had entertained a hope he had disappeared from the plains of Texas, if not from the stage of action altogether—Great God!"

The last words were occasioned by the cry of "Ladrones! ladrones! Indians! Indians!" and the crash of firearms and wails of agony.

Don Rossevan quickly put his head out to see what the matter was. A number of leaden balls tore through the top of his calesa. He saw the footman fall with a heavy thud to the ground, a lifeless corpse. A yell rose on the air. The party had been attacked by a band of Apache Indians and white robbers!

CHAPTER VI.

HOW LITTLE TEXAS DODGED.

To return to the Boy Mustanger and Christie Miles whom we left standing in the door of the mustanger's cabin, face to face with the notorious Dr. Rocheford and a band of Boniface's regulators. The latter was as greatly surprised by the sudden appearance of the boy and girl as these two young people were startled by the presence of the former in the cabin. Not dreaming of the house being occupied by any one, and seeing no light until the door was thrown wide, Little Texas found himself stumbling blindly into danger.

"Smoke of the Inferno!" exclaimed Dr. Rocheford, in amazement. "Who and what have we here? Do my eyes deceive me? Is it the boy whose right hand belongs to me? *Sacre!* it is, by the stinging tarantula! Nab him! ah—out and after him, men!—catch them, for a double glory awaits us!"

Before the Frenchman had finished, Little Texas, with great presence of mind, sprang backward into the darkness and pulled Christie with him. The shadows of oak and cedar lay thick over and around the humble home of the Boy Mustanger, and into this darkness, in pursuit of the maiden and mustanger, plunged the outlaw rangers. So close were they after them that they felt sure of their capture; but with quick wit, the boy, instead of making straight for the wood, as would naturally be expected, stepped aside and pressing himself close against the side of the house, whispered words of cheer and caution to Christie. They were within arm's reach of every outlaw that went out of the door, but the villains were so blinded by their excitement, and the sudden change from light to darkness, that they passed them by unobserved, and were soon wrangling in darkness and confusion out in the woods.

Little Texas laughed to himself as he heard them calling to each other, and cursing, when one would seize another under the impression it was the fugi-

tives. When assured they were all out of the building, the lad whispered to Christie:

"Miss Miles, we don't want to stay out in the woods to-night, and so let's slip into the house and conceal ourselves in the loft. They'll never mistrust us of doin' such a daring thing, and to-morrow when they go away, we'll be safe."

"I am willing to follow you, Texas," Christie responded.

"Then we'll have to be awful quiet, Christie," he adjured.

And so they turned and entered the cabin. Little Texas climbed into the loft and let down a short ladder, by means of which the maiden ascended also. Then Texas went down again and securing some dried venison from his larder, and a couple of blankets and a robe from the pile on the floor, he returned to Christie, and drew up the ladder. This done, he spread the robe and invited Christie to a seat upon it; and when both had taken a position that they would, very likely, be required to keep through the night, he produced his dried venison, cut it into thin slices, and divided it with Christie. And, while awaiting the return of the regulators, they ate their meager supper.

It was not long until Rocheford came in, out of wind and humor, for again had the boy thwarted him; and then, one by one, the rest of the regulators returned and resumed their places, and their pipes, their oaths and ribald jests before the fire. Every word spoken was plainly audible to the young people in the garret, and more than once were the ears of the sensitive maiden shocked, and a blush brought to her face by the language of those ruffians.

Little Texas himself was the topic of much conversation among the villains; but finally the discourse turned upon Black Boniface and his visit to the emigrant camp on the San Saba; and our hero-thriller smiled when he heard them speculating upon the captain's probable success in procuring a new wife among the fair ones of Colonel Miles's colony; and it was all the more pleasing and gratifying to him when he realized that he had thwarted the regulator in his attempt to abduct Christie, and that, too, in the very moment of his triumph. He heard the outlaw wondering who the girl could be that had entered the cabin with him—Little Texas—but they never once suspected the truth.

After the outlaws had exhausted all other subjects they laid their plans for the morrow. The first thing was to make another search for the Boy Mustanger. They had found his horse and knew that he could not be far away.

As the hours wore on some of the regulators stretched themselves upon the floor and fell asleep, and soon all became quiet in and around the cabin. And, the noise and excitement having abated, Christie, overcome with fatigue, sunk into quiet slumber also; while Little Texas, pistol in hand, sat by her side and half dozing kept a watch over her.

And thus the night wore on. The moon went down and through a crack in the wall Little Texas saw the morning star sailing up in the eastern sky, trailing after her the rosy beams of early morn.

About this time there was a stir in the room below. Grumbling and cursing the outlaws started from their sleep. They kindled a fire upon the hearth to light the room. They breakfasted upon the Young Mustanger's supplies of venison, mesquite and coffee; and, although it was still dark outside, they were soon ready for departure.

The Boy Mustanger congratulated himself upon the prospect of soon being alone so far as the enemy were concerned.

Christie was still asleep, and the boy thought of the pleasant surprise it would be to her, upon awakening to learn that their persecutors were gone.

The youth heard the regulators tramping about below getting ready, as he supposed, for departure. He heard some of them go out and then come back and throw something solid upon the floor. He heard them saying something about fire. The pungent odor of smoke suddenly floated up to his nostrils. What did it mean? He stooped and peered through a crack of the loft floor. He started back with a suppressed cry of horror. The outlaws were firing the cabin. They were building a "log-heap" in the middle of the floor. Hot smoke filled the garret. Christie coughed in her sleep. A lurid glare burst through the entrance to the loft and the narrow cracks in the floor.

The Boy Mustanger's soul was filled with terror. He awoke his companion—not to a happy surprise, but to a scene of terror. The hot smoke and the red flame beneath them filled her young heart with a dreadful fear. A shriek burst from her lips. The robbers below heard it!

"Wasn't that in the loft?" cried Rocheford.

"I verily believe it was, doctor," replied another.

"Gods of Olympus! Bunty, I thought I told you to search the loft," said the Frenchman.

"And I thought I did," returned Bunty.

"*Sacre!* then search again, man!" was the order.

Steps are heard crossing the room. The hands of a man are seen to reach upward and grasp the board at the entrance to the garret. Then a head appears through the opening and a pair of eyes set in a fat, bearded face peer into the smoke and darkness of that retreat, as the body hangs on the edge of the opening. A pistol in the hand of Little Texas rings out with a dull, stunning report. With a cry the robber drops through the opening, his body falling on the floor below with a dull, sickly thud.

"My God! some one in the loft has killed Bunty!" shrieked Dr. Rocheford.

A cry of rage and vengeance breaks upon the ears of the young friends. The fury of demons has been aroused in the breasts of the regulators.

"Poke up the fire, boys!" Roche. is heard to

exclaim, "and whoever is in that loft, we will cook him off. Gatamozini! Ye gods! let our vengeance be swift and terrible!"

CHAPTER VII.

BOY INGENUITY VERSUS ROBERT VENGEANCE.

Half fainting and half suffocating, Christie sat up on her couch, confused, bewildered and terrified.

Little Texas felt the great responsibility that he had brought upon himself by taking refuge in the garret, and determined to do his utmost to repair his blunder, as he now considered it. Never wanting for an expedient in the time of danger, he soon had his course marked out, and stooping, he whispered to Christie:

"Come, Christie, there's an egress from the loft—we must escape."

Then upon his hands and knees the boy crept back to where the roof almost touched the floor and pushed aside some of the long clapboards, making an opening large enough to admit the passage of his body and the ladder. The latter he put out and placed upon the ground. The eaves of the roof were not over six feet from the ground, and it was for this means that the Young Mustang proposed to attempt an escape. Creeping back to Christie, he said:

"We must now be brave, and get out of this danger, Miss Miles. We've not a moment to lose, remember. If I'd once thought of the regulators firing at me, I'd never have come up here."

"You did what you considered for the best, Texas," replied the maiden, encouragingly; "I have no fault to find with anything you have done."

"Thank you, little woman! Now come, let me help you out upon the roof before we are strangled." Saying they crept back to the opening and crept out upon the low, flat roof. Texas pointed to the ladder to Christie and assisted her upon it, and a few moments more they stood upon the eaves. Then the boy removed the ladder to conceal their means of escape.

The flames by this time had spread so that the regulators were driven from the room. They stood in front of the cabin, listening. They were surprised, puzzled by the silence in the loft. The red light shining through the door lit up their bearded faces.

Keeping the building between them and the outlaws, Little Texas led Christie back into the shadows of the woods.

"Thank the good, kind Lord!" he exclaimed, when permitted to breathe the pure, fresh air of heaven; "again are we out of their clutches. The next thing to our horses, for without them we will be left in a bad situation. I will go and get them if such a thing is possible, if you think you can remain here until I return."

"Oh, yes, Texas, I can stay. May God speed you!" she said.

"Here, Christie, is one of my pistols; it may serve as a good turn, no telling," and placing a tiny silver-mounted pistol in her hand, he crept away through the shadows to the opposite side of the main where the horses had been left. He could now see the regulators in front of the burning cabin, and they appeared to be greatly exercised over the continued silence in the loft. Rocheford paced to and fro like a caged tiger, muttering fearful oaths. He believed their victims had been smothered or suffocated in the heat and smoke. He never thought of their attempting to escape by way of the roof; but even while he and his comrades stood waiting for the news of the unknown enemies, whoever they might be, Little Texas had succeeded in reaching Christie's side and in getting away into the shadows with it unobserved.

Leading the animal around to where the maiden was waiting, he assisted her into the saddle; then again requesting her to await his return, he set out after his own horse.

About this time the flames began to eat through the roof of the cabin and light up the surrounding. A scowl of bitter disappointment was upon the faces of the outlaws. Their inhuman scheme had failed in its object, and stupid as they were in their blind fury, they, at length, began to suspect something of the truth—that their victims had escaped. Rocheford walked around the building. A tongue of flame was darting through the hole in the roof made by Little Texas. On the ground near by lay a ladder. This told the whole story—the outlaws had again been outwitted.

At this moment the roof of the cabin fell in, and from the interior of the building went up a Vesuvius of sparks, flame and smoke. The vicinity was lit up for many rods with the glare of the mid-day sun, and within the radius of light, seated upon a buckskin mustang—the very animal that Black Boniface had taken from Little Texas and sold to Colonel Miles—the astonished regulators beheld Christie Miles! Both horse and rider stood gazing in wild amazement and a kind of terrified fascination at the burning building.

For a moment the outlaws stood as if rooted to the spot, but they soon recovered their presence of mind and started toward the maiden. Christie looked for Little Texas, and in her excitement and anxiety she called his name. But he did not answer; he was nowhere to be seen. To tarry longer would be fatal to her, and turning her mustang's head, she galloped away into the darkness of the woods alone.

Meanwhile, Little Texas was making his way, as far as possible, to where Lightfoot was hitched; and although the discovery of Christie proved a diversion in his favor, that enabled him to reach his animal and mount it, he was not quick enough to elude the eyes of the regulators, who rushed in a wild charge upon him; but he made good his escape into the woods, only to realize, with a quickening

pulse, that he was separated from Christie, and when and where they would meet again the Lord only knew. However, he could not remain idle when reminded that it was his own adventuresome spirit that had brought about this separation, and so he rode around into the head of the valley in hopes of finding her. Now and then he stopped to listen, but all was quiet; and having reached the upper side of the valley he returned south and made his way from the scene of his night's adventure.

Daylight at length dawned and found him still alone pushing on, he scarcely knew whither. The sun came up in a cloudless sky. The trees shook the dew from their emerald robes in the perfumed breath of the young day. Birds sang in glee, though their song seemed like mockery to the heart of the Boy Lasso-thrower. The solitude might have seemed a paradise sweet with the incense of the wild-wood and vocal with the voices of Nature, and in which the young boy rode a silvan god, had all been gold that glitters. But, alas! that wood was the pathway of outlawry, the ambush of death, and he who journeyed on through its silent halls was drinking the dregs of bitter grief. For, deep in the breast of the Boy Mustang burned a consuming love for the fair girl that a cruel fate had torn from his protection, and now his brain grew dizzy and his heart sick as he sought her everywhere in vain.

In the course of time he debouched into the open prairie. Here he paused to think, but the more he studied over his situation the more confused and troubled his mind became. So he rode on out into the plain. He had no particular point in view; he let his horse take its own course. At noon he stopped in a valley by a little stream watered his animal and turned it loose to feed upon the luxuriant grass. In the course of an hour he resumed his journey—still traveling on like a boat adrift at sea without a compass.

The day was far gone when in the distance he saw a dark body moving over the plain. It appeared to be approaching, and concealing himself in a clump of bushes—one of those prairie-islands that dot the plains of Texas—he awaited its coming. As it drew nearer he saw it was a body of horsemen and a carriage drawn by four horses. It was the escort of Don Juan de Rossevan.

"What in the plague does it mean?" the boy mused; "it looks like a carriage and yet it can't be that; tempest, no! Surely it isn't a stage-coach making a new route—cuttin' across the near way through this 'ere wild, ungodly land. If the Indians and regulators only git their eyes on that outfit they'll swoop down upon her like a duck on a June bug."

The boy's words seemed, in a measure, prophetic, for scarcely had he spoken the last word ere the crash of rifles came up from a little ravine to the left of the party. Then from the tall grass rose a score of Apache Indians and white robbers and with a yell charged upon the escort, firing as they went. A battle ensued. Little Texas saw one of the men on the calesa throw up his hands, reel in his seat and then fall lifeless to the earth. Another volley from the enemy and he saw the driver sink down, while the horses, frightened by the din of the conflict, started away at full speed and came plunging down the plain with fearful rapidity uncurbed by the hand of a driver. Meanwhile, the escort was engaged in a desperate struggle with the Indians.

Little Texas saw that the runaway team was going to pass near him, and it at once became a question with him who was in the carriage; but as if in answer to the question, a man in brilliant attire put his head and shoulders out of the vehicle and attempted to climb to the driver's box. Then the carriage swept past the Lasso-thrower. Upon the coach he saw the dying driver with the lines still grasped in his hand. Inside he beheld a young and beautiful woman cowering with terror. This was enough. The sight of the lady's face was sufficient to rouse the spirit of manhood in the boy's breast, and as a look of resolute determination flashed in his eyes he said, addressing his horse:

"Friend or foe, Lightfoot, they shall have our help. Come, now, my good fellow, let us to the rescue. Away, Lightfoot, away!" and like an arrow the noble beast shot out over the plain upon the track of the flying team.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTIE'S FLIGHT AND ADVENTURE.

CHRISTIE MILES had become so worn by constant exposure to danger, and kept under such a continual mental strain that she became almost insensible to fear, and but for her resolute spirit and strong constitution for one of her tender years, she would have sunk down in utter hopelessness and despair. There was, also, another source of inspiration to the little maiden's indomitable courage and pluck; during the short time she had known Little Texas she had come to regard him with a feeling of admiration that was stronger than mere friendship, and when she at length found herself riding alone in the dark, dreary wood—fleeing from the cabin of the mustanger and the followers of Black Boniface, her young heart cried out in its love for its lost mate; and she really lingered at times by the way in hopes the Boy Mustang might find her, and not until the clatter of pursuing hoofs broke upon the ear did she give up all hopes of meeting her brave little friend, and put her horse to its utmost speed.

Where she was going the maiden knew not, nor did she know what moment she might ride into the power of some enemy, or be hurled into some pitfall; but she rode on hoping and praying for the best.

Daylight dawned clear and bright, and with the receding shadows of night went the shadows of fear from Christie's heart. She assured herself, with a

feeling of relief, that she had eluded her enemies, and permitted her faithful, worn mustang to move along at a leisurely walk, cropping the brush and tall grass as it went. She traveled on and on, until the sun crossed the meridian, and yet she seemed no nearer civilization or the abode of man than when the morning broke upon her. She was now growing tired and hungry, but there was no rest, no food for her. The terrors of another night would soon be upon her, and the knowledge of this, added to her fatigue and fasting, began to tell upon her young spirit. While brooding over them, a voice called to her from the woods.

With a start she looked around, and saw a horseman approaching her. He was a stranger, and, although her first impulse was to turn and flee, something stayed her flight. Then it occurred to her, all of a sudden, that she had seen the stranger before. He was a middle-aged man with a smoothly-shaven face, and a red scar upon the left cheek. The man's general appearance was indicative of having been long in the saddle. He lifted his hat and bowed as he rode up.

"Good-evening, fair stranger," he said. "I am truly astonished to find a lady riding alone in this lonely wood."

Christie started, and a shudder ran over her frame at the sound of the man's voice. To her confused and worn mind it was vaguely and indistinctly associated with something of the past, but she could not tell what, nor could she recall the time and place where she met this man.

"I am not here by my own free will, sir," she replied; "I must confess I am lost. Perhaps you will be kind enough to set me right."

The man looked at her as if trying to recall the past, then glancing at the horse she rode, a light of recognition passed over his face, and he said:

"I declare, my little wail, I think I have met you before, have I not?"

"Perhaps you have," was the maiden's reply.

"If I mistake not, I sold your father that pony you ride?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Christie, with a sudden start, for all was clear to her now, and a shudder went to her heart; but her woman's ready wit was brought into play, and she continued, without betraying other than feelings of surprise and pleasure: "you are Captain Seneca Lucas, the Texan trader?"

"I am, Miss Miles," he said, with a smile.

"Oh, sir, I am very glad to meet you!" she said, a little excitedly, though she told what was not true, but acted on the theory that the end justifies the means; "a series of great misfortunes have befallen us since you visited our camp."

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed the man, looking at the maiden with a faint smile visible upon his face.

"The robbers have stolen three of our horses, and for all I know, have killed uncle Israel Miles."

"Indeed! Oh, that is too bad, too bad," replied the trader; "but may I ask you where you are going now?"

"I know not where I am going! I am fleeing from danger!"

"I am not far from my ranch, Miss Miles," the trader said, "and if you will accept of my company and hospitality I will be only too happy to escort you to my residence, and thence to your friends to-morrow."

"Oh, I shall be under many obligations to you, kind sir," Christie replied, with promptness, and just as natural as though it were inspired by the heart instead of the brain; "for I shall be only too happy to accept your very kind offer. I am hungry and fatigued, and would surely die were I forced to remain out in this woods and the coming night."

"Then come with me, Miss Miles," he said.

Christie turned her horse and rode along at the trader's side. She conversed with all the joy, frankness and enthusiasm of her girlish nature, but at the same time it was but a disguise to the most dreadful, torturing feeling that had ever disturbed her young heart; for she knew that the smooth-faced, silvery-tongued trader, Seneca Lucas, was Victor Ure, alias Black Boniface!

Again had the man and the maid, the demon and the angel met. With the smiles and duplicity of the one had the confidence and trust of the other once been betrayed; but now all the keen instinct and strategy of woman's nature had been called into action, aroused; and if Black Boniface, as a villain, was possessed of remarkable powers of deceit, deception and cunning, Christie Miles possessed, in a high degree, not only the very opposite of him, but the tact and skill to thwart his designs. She rode away with him because she could do no better at that time. She appeared wonderfully pleased with his company, and led him to believe that she placed all confidence in the world in him. She talked, and laughed, and cried in just such a natural and girlish way that the man became perfectly enraptured with her. But, all the time she was talking at him, her mind was busy with another subject. Her thoughts went back to the day when Captain Lucas had come to their camp with Pegasus, and this thought begot another, and so on. She remembered the effect this man's presence had had upon Edith Clayton, and the words that had escaped her lips while still unconscious, and the question repeated itself in her mind: "What could this man possibly be to Edith Clayton? Did she know him? Did she fear him? If not, what produced the shock that felled her unconscious upon the floor?"

Of course Black Boniface had taken off the wig of black hair and the mask of long black whiskers in which he appeared as the ranger, Victor Ure. This wrought a remarkable change in the appearance of the man, for none but the keenest instinct would ever have discovered that Captain Lucas, Victor Ure

and Black Boniface were one and the same—a trite character. The features of Lucas were more repulsive than those of Ure, for under the mask of the latter was concealed the index of the man's sinful soul.

They conversed quite freely upon different subjects as they rode along. Captain Lucas, the Texan trader, as he had styled himself, lied to her in every breath, and did it, too, with an air of innocence and truth remarkable for its audacity; and upon the other hand, Christie confined herself strictly to the facts in every particular. She narrated her adventure with Black Boniface in such good faith and wonderful indifference to the presence of that grand scoundrel himself that the man was surprised at her manifest ignorance of the existing state of facts. And in this manner they had traveled a couple of miles together. They had entered a dark, lonesome part of the forest, and were descending a rather steep hill. Christie was a little behind her companion—perhaps half the length of her horse's neck. She had been watching her chance—the eye of the regulator was not upon her. She took from her pocket the tiny pistol that Little Texas had given her the night before, and concealed it in the folds of her dress. She knew how to use it. She looked at the outlaw and then at his horse. Her soul shrank from the thought of murder—of having the stain of human blood, however vile, upon her soul. She determined upon the other expedient. Perhaps it would again liberate her from the villain, and without a second thought she held her pistol at the head of the regulator's horse and fired.

Simultaneous with the report of his pistol, Captain Lucas uttered an oath and attempted to strike the weapon from the girl's hand, but he was just the fraction of a second too late, and with an almost human cry the horse plunged forward down the declivity headlong into the valley. Captain Lucas was partially stunned by the fall, and when he regained his feet and collected his senses, he found that innocent, confiding girl was gone.

To say that the outwitted villain swore would not do the subject justice, so we will leave him for the time being, seated upon his dead horse amid the shadows of the valley, and follow the author of his troubles.

The maiden turned her horse's head and rode westward after she had got rid of her escort. The excitement of her adventure with the regulator had stimulated her nerves and strengthened her mind and courage, but this soon began to wear off, and hunger and fatigue attack her vital energies. To these enemies of mind and body were added the depressing influence of night—the melancholy drone of insects' wings, the mournful song of nocturnal voices and the damp and dismal shadows of the lonesome wood. But the maiden kept on; hope was implanted in her young heart. Finally she struck a dim wagon-road leading up a wide valley, and her heart gave a bound of joy. She felt certain that the road would lead to a cattle-ranch, a settlement, or some place where she would find friends, and so she urged on her pony a little faster. She had followed the road about a mile, when, true enough, a light ahead burst upon her view. She rode on until she came to the edge of a little opening, where she drew rein. She saw a massive building before her. It stood upon an elevated piece of ground, and was outlined against the blue sky. It was surrounded by a massive wall, upon the top of which she could see a sentinel standing with a musket at his side. He appeared to be listening, too; and having made these discoveries, Christie began to ask herself these questions: "Is that a fort, garrisoned by soldiers, before me? and has that man heard my approach? Surely, this cannot be; I heard of no forts being anywhere in this country. The building looks like an old ruin, but it is inhabited. Can it be the home of settlers, cattle-men, or mustangers? or can it be that it is the stronghold of Black Boniface?"

The last question caused a shudder to pass over her form and fill her heart with a horrible fear. This was increased by strange sounds coming from the direction of the building, and turning her horse's head down the valley, she fled from the mysterious dwelling.

Down the dim way she rode until her ears were suddenly greeted by a sound coming up the road toward her. She drew rein and listened. She heard the clatter of hoofs and the rattle and hum of wheels coming up the road at a lively pace; and with these were seen mingled the sound of voices and the clanking of military trappings. Was it Black Boniface's robber band approaching? Before the maiden could fully satisfy herself as to this, the party halted, and a stern voice challenged her.

Then from the shadows a man, dressed in all the elegance of a royal prince, emerged, and in the moonlight came toward her.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGER RESCUES ROSSEVAN'S RUNAWAY TEAM.

Down the plain at a fearful rate dashed the terrified horses with the calesa of Don Rossevan, the driver doing his best to hold them in.

"Oh, my God!" cried Edith Clayton, when she heard the clash of fire-arms and saw the Apaches charging up the valley.

"Courage, dear lady," said Don Rossevan, drawing his revolvers, determined to defend the calesa and the fair girl to the last.

The Indians seeing the team dashing away fired another volley at it. Another cry of agony came from the top of the calesa, and the vehicle lunged forward so suddenly that Don Rossevan was almost thrown from his seat. Then the horses seemed to redouble their speed, for the calesa shot forward,

bounding and rocking until it seemed it would be dashed to pieces.

Don Rossevan's face now assumed a look of fear despite his efforts to appear calm in the presence of Edith. Something of the real truth of the situation forced itself upon his mind. He put his head out at the door and took in the state of affairs. Back behind he saw his escort engaged in a conflict with the enemy. He turned his head and glanced forward. A shiver of horror ran through his veins, for over the edge of the foot-board he saw the head of the driver hanging. In his hands he grasped the lines, but it was in the grasp of death—the driver had been slain. The lines hung slack, and the horses, uncurbed, ran with wild afright.

The most imminent danger threatened Rossevan and his fair companion. The calesa was in danger of being upset or dashed to pieces at any moment.

Don Rossevan saw that he must act if he would avert some dread catastrophe. He could no longer conceal the truth from Edith who sat trembling and sobbing with terror in her seat.

"I must climb out and get hold of the lines, fair senorita," he said; "the driver is dead; but take courage."

He divested himself of his serape and sword, then swung himself out at the door and endeavored to climb into the driver's seat; but the calesa rocked, his foot slipped and he came nigh being thrown under the flying wheels. He climbed back into the vehicle with a sprained ankle, but, determined upon stopping the team, he drew a knife and was about to cut away the top of the calesa when a horseman dashed along side the vehicle, riding as close to the wheels as possible. He looked and saw that the horseman was a stranger—a mere youth. For a moment it was a question whether he was friend or foe, but before he had time for a second thought the youth, with the agility of a circus-rider, rose to his knees in the saddle-seat, then drawing up one foot and planting it by the other knee he made a quick leap and landed upon the flying calesa.

An exclamation burst from the lips of Don Rossevan. He had got a glimpse of the boy's face as he sprang from his horse. It was an honest, manly face, and the Spaniard's heart took courage, and when he heard the voice of the young stranger trying to check the flying horses, and felt the calesa slackening up, a cry of joy burst from his lips.

"Thank God, senorita!" he exclaimed, "a friend has come to our rescue! Blessed Virgil! the team is coming to a halt!"

A few minutes later the flying, terrified horses were brought to a stand by the hand of the fearless young stranger.

No sooner had they stopped than Rossevan, lame as he was, sprang from the vehicle, doffed his hat to the youth in the driver's seat, and in the most grateful tone thanked him for what he had done—for saving his and the fair Edith's life.

"You're welcome, general," was the youth's response; "but I tell you things was lively as a hornet's-nest for awhile, and there's no time to be lost in gittin' out of here. If them Apaches lick your friends they'll foller you up and raise Cain with you. I am sorry I can't go any further with you, for I've more work ahead of me jist now than forty sich boys can do."

"But, my boy," said Don Rossevan, "I must know your name. Sir, I mistrust you are Little Texas, the Boy Mustanger?"

"You hit the nail on the head, square pop, general; that's my name," replied the boy.

"Ah, my boy, I'm rejoiced to meet you—to know you. None but Little Texas could have performed the feat that you did, and for your kindness, senor, I do want to bestow something besides mere words upon you. In honor of my regard and esteem for your bravery and kindness, permit me to present to you this sword and belt worth a fortune in itself."

He took from the calesa his sword, a small, keen Damascus blade with a hilt set in diamonds and pearls, and banded it to the Boy Mustanger, who still sat in the box.

The lad took the blade, ignorant of its true value aside from that of a weapon. A look of boyish delight and pride kindled in his eyes as he buckled the belt around his waist; then, when he saw how much smaller he was than the donor, he laughed outright.

"Better to buckle the boy onto the sword," he said; "but, stranger, I am proud of this gift. I never had anything so nice given me in all my life, and if the 'Paches and regulators don't keep away from me now I'll slice some of them up. Thank you, stranger."

The boy descended from the driver's seat, giving the lines to Don Rossevan; then he called up his horse, that was grazing a short way off, and mounted it. This brought him in a position where he could see the white face of Edith, to whom he touched his hat and bowed.

The battle between the troopers and Indians could still be heard in the distance, and the Boy Mustanger seemed impatient to be off to the scene of conflict. With a wave of his hand and a "good-by" to the man and woman he was off like the wind.

Speaking a few words of encouragement to Edith, Don Rossevan mounted the driver's seat and drove rapidly away.

The meeting and parting with Little Texas had been under such trying and exciting circumstances that it did not occur to Edith to inquire after Christie until it was too late—until the distance shut the form of the Boy Mustanger from her view.

The battle between Rossevan's troopers and the Apaches was a desperate one. After the second discharge of firearms by the Indians at least a score of the red demons arose from the tall grass and charged the troopers with lances. The latter opened a murderous fire with carbines upon them, for a

moment checking their advance; but at this juncture half a dozen more Indians with a led horse for each of the footmen appeared at a sweeping gallop from behind a swell in the plain, and a few moments later every savage that was not down was mounted.

With a yell the painted warriors charged upon the troopers, receiving from the latter another broadside that told fearfully upon their ranks; but mad with a thirst for blood they came on. The troopers drew their swords and prepared for the onset. Then followed a yell and a crash. The enemies, about equal now in numbers, had met. Swords and spears clashed together, and flashed and gleamed in the sunlight.

The followers of Don Rossevan were brave and fearless men, and, being skilled and scientific swordsmen, it was but play for them to parry the lances of the Apaches, and at the same time deal telling and deadly blows. The result of this advantage was the utter demoralization of the Apaches and a complete and overwhelming victory for the troopers. The Indians took to flight and for some distance a running fight was kept up, and but for the superior speed of the Apaches' horses not one of them would have escaped.

When the troopers finally gave up the chase they turned about and started in pursuit of Don Rossevan's carriage.

It was a couple of hours or more before they overtook the calesa, to find Rossevan in the driver's seat with the driver lying dead at his feet.

When he learned how the battle had gone, the Spaniard spoke a few words of praise to his men, then descended from the box and entered the calesa, a trooper taking the lines.

"Praise God, senorita," he said, "we have escaped, but it was a miraculous escape. I hope I find you feeling much better, senorita."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Rossevan," she replied; "since your friends joined us with news of their victory, a terrible weight has been lifted from my mind. I have one thing to regret, however, and that is that I did not think to inquire of Little Texas whether he has seen sister Christie."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the man, regretfully; "I am to be censured for such an oversight; I hope you will pardon me, however, senorita."

"Oh, sir!" cried Edith, "you had enough to think of. I could not think of expecting so much from you, for you have already made too much sacrifice in our behalf."

"No, no, senorita," he replied; "I feel thankful that I have been able to serve your guardian and yourself as I have; but I feel that the worst is over with, and hope that by dark we will be at our destination."

The calesa rumbled on and on over plain and valley. The hours wore away and the sun went down, but, contrary to Rossevan's most sanguine hope, they had not reached their journey's end. In fact, they were some miles from there when darkness set in.

The shadows of night filled Edith with renewed fears and terrors. They had entered a densely-forested valley where every footfall, every creak of the springs or snort of a horse seemed freighted with a thousand horrors as they were repeated in hollow echoes upon the dismal night. Now and then flashes of moonlight flitted across the windows of the calesa, starting the maiden as though they had been the flashes of a gun; and thus were her fears kept worked up to the highest pitch. Her companion talked in cheerful tones and endeavored, by every means possible, to dispel the gloom and shadows from her mind.

Suddenly the calesa stopped. An exclamation of fear involuntarily escaped Edith's lips.

Don Rossevan opened the door and looked out. A trooper rode up to the calesa and said:

"Senor, a horseman is coming down the road from the direction of the Ruins de Rossevan."

Edith's heart rose in her throat.

Don Rossevan sprang from the calesa, advanced to the head of the horses and looked up the road. A little way ahead of the team lay a small opening, flooded with moonlight, and across this opening, true enough, the horseman was approaching.

"That's a woman," said Rossevan to the man behind him, as the unknown drew nearer to them.

Just then a trooper cried, "Halt!"

The woman drew rein, and Rossevan, advancing toward her, asked:

"Lady, who are you that rides this way and so late?"

The woman hesitated with fear or doubt. "Have no fears, lady; we are neither outlaws nor Indians."

A little cry of surprise and joy escaped her lips, then she said:

"I am lost, sir."

"Your name, senorita?"

"Christie Miller," she replied, and her words reached the listening ear of the trembling Edith, who cried out:

"Oh, Christie! Christie! my darling sister, can it be you?"

"Edith Clayton!" burst from Christie's lips; "do my ears deceive?"

"No, no, sweet sister, I am here!" replied the delighted Edith.

Christie rode up to the calesa and sprang from her pony and rushed into Edith's arms. For a moment there was a brief silence of joy; then Rossevan ordered a trooper to take charge of Christie's horse, assisted the sisters into the calesa, and ordering himself, gave orders to move on.

As they rumbled along Christie narrated her adventures with Black Boniface, and recounted the events that had transpired the night previous at the

home of the gallant Boy Mustang, as well as her second meeting with the regulators and her escape. Then from the lips of Edith she received the joyful intelligence that Colonel Miles was living, and that they would soon be in his presence.

Don Rossevan had little to say from this on. He had no desire to interrupt the happy meeting of the two ladies; moreover, he was troubled in mind over the information that Black Boniface and his followers were in the vicinity.

In the course of another hour the calesa again stopped, when Rossevan said:

"There, señoritas, we have reached the Ruins de Rossevan."

The maidens had been so deeply absorbed in each other's society and happiness that they had taken no note of time or aught else until their companion spoke. Then they looked out. The moon shone full upon the surroundings, and before them, looming up against the north, was a long, low structure—apparently a mass of ruins—overgrown with wild ivy and other parasitical vines—and from the midst of which a light shone brightly.

Edith recognized the place as the same from which she had fled but an hour before.

Don Rossevan assisted the girls from the calesa, then giving each an arm he conducted them to the house. Reaching the door he rapped upon it, and a moment later it swung slowly open upon wheezy hinges, and Rossevan and his fair companions entered into a long, wide hall that was dimly lighted, and pervaded with the sweet perfume of flowers and the soft, dulcet music of an Æolian harp fixed in the window at the further end of the passage.

Turning from the hall Rossevan led the girls into a brilliantly-lighted and handsomely-furnished room, where a young, handsome and dark-eyed girl rose to receive them with kind words of welcome.

"This, ladies," said Don Rossevan to Edith and Christie, "is my sister, Anita Rossevan."

The young dark-eyed maiden greeted the girls kindly and welcomed them to the home of Don Juan de Rossevan; and then having assisted them to disrobe, she conducted them into an adjoining room where, weak and pale, Colonel Israel Miles sat in an easy-chair, ready to receive them.

CHAPTER X.

OLD MORALITY IN TROUBLE—FAGAN'S CATTLE-RANCH. DR. JUDITHAN DOVER and Old Morality were sound asleep in their respective tents when Don Juan de Rossevan and his gay escort visited camp, and it was not until that gentleman had been gone with Edith more than an hour that they made their appearance from their tents. Dr. Dover was the first to join the little group outside discussing the events of the day, and as soon as apprised of the visit of Rossevan, the old fellow flew into a passion.

"There! by the dancing dervishes!" he exclaimed, "you've all branded yourselves a set of nincompoops—gone and give the colonel's other girl into the hands of the bloody hollyons. Oh, Lord!"

"Doctor, there was no deception about that man Rossevan," said Mr. Byrd; "besides, he—"

"Neither was there deception in the kiss of Judas!" exclaimed the doctor, pacing the camp in rage.

"I was going to say," continued Byrd, "that he brought a letter from the colonel who lies very low, from effects of wounds, in the gentleman's house; and it is a genuine letter too. He sent for Edith or Christie, or both if they could both leave."

"What did yer say the feller's name was what come for the girls?" suddenly exclaimed Old Morality, who, at this juncture, made his appearance, having caught a part of the conversation with Dover in his tent.

"Juan de Rossevan," replied Byrd, consulting Miles's letter.

"Vipers and tar-rant'lers!" exclaimed the old man, in astonishment, "you don't tell me that Don Rossevan was here, do you?"

"That was the name."

"What for a lookin' critter was he?"

Byrd described the man and outfit.

"That war him, by the kisin' Judas! Why in thunder didn't ye wake me?"

"Then you know him, do you, Morality?"

"Know him! yes, I should think I did know him; and I know him well enough to know that Edith Clayton will be his captive."

"My Lord! is he a robber, too?"

"There!" broke in Dr. Dover, "what did I tell you? Oh, by heavens! you'll learn wisdom from experience—bitter experience. You're a set of nincompoops to just deliberately give a girl into the hands of a vile old robber!"

"Did I insinuate that he was a robber, ole pill-lags?" asked Old Morality; "did I even hint at his being any thing but what he is—a perfect gentleman, a scholar and a Christian? Yea, verily I say unto you, folks, that Don Juan de Rossevan is one of the whitest-souled, big-hearted men that ever made love by the Gaudiquiver or drank in the glories of an Andalusian night. If he said Colonel Miles was at his ranch, why, the colonel's there, you can bet your last ap on that."

"Man!" stormed Dr. Dover, "I believe you're in league with that man, and that you are both out-laws!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the old ranger, good-naturedly. "You're an ole cuss, doctor, and bet you can't tell a pill from a bug. What I alluded to when I said Edith 'd be the Don's captive, was that she'd fall to her eyebrows in love with him, because she can't help it, dashed to the doctors' corner in perdition if she can, for he's the quintessence of all that's noble and manly in man. That's what and who Don Rossevan is, gentlemen."

This explanation relieved the settlers of the emotional morass that first worked up in their minds,

and led to further question regarding Don Rossevan; but Old Morality evaded the questions in such an adroit and clever way that the settlers were convinced that he knew more of Rossevan than he felt at liberty to tell.

Upon being informed that the Spaniard had been gone but a short time, Old Morality took leave of the emigrants, mounted his horse and rode away, following the track of the calesa. This was further evidence of some relationship between Rossevan and the old ranger.

It was the intention of Morality to overtake the party when he left camp; but after riding for two or three hours upon the track of the calesa, he gave up all hope of overtaking it, and struck out across the plain toward the West. Not a sign of life was visible except a number of buzzards circling in the heavens far to the westward. The plain stretched away before him to the blue horizon, relieved, now and then, of its monotonous sameness by a little motte or clump of bushes—lands in the ocean of verdure. To Old Morality, however, these mottes were only a relief to the eye—not to the mind. Experience had taught him that they were the Scylla and Charybdis of the prairie ocean; that from their cover the Indian and the robber lay in wait for the merchantman, the trader and the emigrant. Therefore, he shunned them as much as possible.

The old man rode on, apparently indifferent to all around him save those buzzards wheeling in the air. Their presence was portentous to him as it ever is to the borderman; but, with the open plain before him and a swift horse under him, he felt no fear of danger and rode leisurely on. He had journeyed perhaps five miles upon the plain, and was passing along between two little clumps of timber, when a rifle, in the furthest one away, suddenly rung out and the old man's horse reared and plunged forward with a piteous cry and sunk quivering to the earth.

Then forth from their ambush galloped half a score of horsemen with drawn pistols. They were outlaws, and the old ranger seeing it would be useless to contend with such great odds, returned his pistol to its place, and with folded arms calmly awaited their approach.

At the head of the party rode the notorious Dr. Rocheford.

"A glorious subject!" exclaimed the villain, as he rode up to where the ranger stood.

"So it is, my gallant knight of the cross-bones," replied a comrade.

"A willing subject in the interest of science," added another, seeing he made no resistance.

The regulators drew up around the old man who stood calmly regarding them with silent contempt.

"A purty critter he is," said Rocheford and all laughed heartily, for Old Morality had assumed an air and attitude that lorded upon the ludicrous and comical.

"You gol-dashed tar-rant'lers and blood-suckers of the peraro!" the old man exclaimed savagely, "you can 'ford to laugh and giggle at an old, hoary-headed man after you've got the 'vantage of him; but, dash your cowardly pickers! I can take you, two at a time, and knock the butt end of your brains out easier'n slippin' on ice; and if you don't believe it, jist climb me and I'll dish it up to you so hot that you'll think you're 'thar, you quintessences of cowardice and turkey-buzzardness!"

"The old chap imagines he's a hoss," said a robber.

"And if ye don't b'lieve I are, climb me, will ye? I'll take ye with one eye shot, square holts, and double ye like a fish grub," replied the ranger.

"We know you, Old Morality," replied Rocheford; "we have had our eyes on your moral carcass for two weeks or more."

"The devil's had hisen on you ever since you drew your first breath and war kicked out of society," replied Morality.

"Morality!" sneered Rocheford, "what a misapplication of a name that is! Old Rascallion would be better; however, anything will do what little time you'll have to remain away from your Satanic master. Why, sir, I am a searcher for knowledge and natural curiosities, and I have a desire to measure your brain, if you have one, bottle your heart and dissect your liver in order to find out wherein your self-conceit and rascalities lie."

"You're a great man, ar'n't ye?" replied Morality; "you're the Rose o' Sharon—the Cedar o' Lebanon, ar'n't ye? you're the great hugawapusandi, ar'n't ye? You're the tall eend of a family o' dirty cowards and French fools, ar'n't ye? Why, sir, the carcass of that dead hoss is worth more'n your hull soul—I wouldn't begin to trade, even if the devil hadn't a fust mortgage on your pestiferous soul."

"Well, this play on words is not business; men, mount this specimen of the genus catamount upon one of those horses and we'll be moving," said Rocheford, nettled by the old man's words.

There were three or four led horses in the party and upon one of these Old Morality was mounted; then the band moved away toward the north, apparently satisfied with their day's work.

Old Morality saw that the withers of the horse he rode were stained with crusted blood, and, knowing by the caparisons that it was a robber outfit, he said to Rocheford:

"I see evidence of death in your family, mighty man of Texas; I see claret has been spilt on your hoss's withers—reckon Little Texas or somebody's been applyin' lead to your friend's anatomy—docterin' 'em up, eh? Lead to wusser'n a tar-rant'ler bite to strike in, and all the horse-hair ropes in Texas won't keep it from crossin' the line and divin' into a feller's system. I reckon it war Little Texas that's been playin' 'ill with your duck, eh? Ah! I tell you what, ole frog-eater, that boy's a little tar-rapin'—doodle as a catamount in a fight—sharp as a

cactus-point in business, quick as jagged lightning, and can beat all Texas throwin' a lasso, or chuckin' lead into a robber's diaphragm. I reckon he's an other subject you've got in view, ar'n't he, froggy?"

"Yes!" hissed the Frenchman, "and by the Virgin I will have him, too!"

"I would if I war you," replied the prisoner, sarcastically. "for he's a good 'un."

The robbers laughed at the old man's indifference and audacity.

"Old man," said Rocheford, stung to the quick by Morality's retort, "I'll make you grimace out of the other corner of your mouth before you get through with me."

"And then old Satan 'll make you squirm like a maggot afore he gits through with you," replied the ranger. "If Little Texas 'll only keep his word he'll give you a check for Dimination afore the owls hoot or the wolf leaves his lair."

"Sacre! what do you mean, old vagabond?" demanded the Frenchman, in evident fear.

"I mean, monsieur," replied Morality, with a bland smile, "that Little Texas, the Boy Mustang, has a very pretty little rifle, and in that rifle he has put a charge of powder, and upon that powder he has rammed home a half-ounce ball of lead. Now, sir, his intentions are to excite that powder by tetchin' it up behind with a spark of fire, cause it to kick furiously and slam that chunk of lead through your diaphragm. Now do ye understand?"

Rocheford involuntarily glanced around him, for he feared Little Texas more than he feared the wrath of God, despite his boastful language.

Old Morality roared with laughter.

Thus they moved on, the ranger arguing and quarreling with his captors, as though perfectly indifferent to his situation, or as to what they might do with him.

At different times the old man overheard the regulators talking about Fagan's Ranch, which he knew was situated some miles ahead of them; and as Jerome Fagan had always borne a good reputation, he came to the conclusion that their designs were to make a raid upon his ranch. It is true, he also heard them talking about a bull-fight at the ranch that night, but supposed their language had a different meaning from that implied—that they were talking in riddles. But whatever his doubts and speculations were, concerning his captor's designs upon Fagan's Ranch, all were finally dismissed when the party, in open day, rode boldly into the ranch, and, to the surprise of the ranger, were cordially received by Jerome Fagan and his friends.

This convinced Morality that the cattle-men were not what they had always been represented. If they were not in league with the regulators in crime, it was, at least, certain that they were courting the friendship of the robbers, and harboring them as self-protection—to save the ranch from their depredations.

Fagan's Ranch was situated in an abrupt bend of a little stream called Mesquit Creek. The place was heavily timbered, and well watered—natural advantages for a cattle-ranch. A number of low log cabins stood upon a little eminence overlooking the peninsula, or bend, and were occupied by Fagan and his employees, numbering in all, women and children, fifty or sixty persons. Of these, at least thirty were men. Back of the cabins were stables and sheds for horses, and south of the cabins were the cattle-pens. Of the latter there were four, with a capacity for thousands of cattle. One of the four, however, was quite small, and built in a circular form, of logs set upright in the ground like a stockade. This pen was fifteen feet in height, and was called the Wild Pen, in contradistinction to the others. It was intended for wild and vicious cattle, and those recently taken with the lasso from the plain. It was built in a circular form to prevent the animals from "cornering" each other in a fight.

Upon one side of the Wild Pen, with front resting upon the logs of the stockade, and rear upon other upright posts, was an elevated cabin, or shanty, covered with shingles. This was a watch-house. When the pen was full of cattle it was found necessary to keep a man on guard, day and night, to prevent any accident. From this elevated point the guard could overlook all the pens, as they all cornered there.

In this watch-house, Old Morality was imprisoned, securely bound, and one of the robbers, along with the regular watch, was placed in guard over him. There was no window, and but a single low, narrow door in the building, but in this door was cut a wicket or opening large enough for a man to see out, and through which Morality was enabled to survey his situation.

For some reason or other there were no cattle in the Wild Pen with the exception of a single Texan bull—a wild, ferocious-looking fellow with a fierce eye, glossy coat, and white, slender horns, sharp as rapiers, and fully four feet long. This animal stood near what appeared to be a cage, on the opposite side of the pen, bellowing, and pawing the ground in apparent rage.

The regulator and ranchero, who were seated on the platform in front of the cabin, were watching the bull and laughing at his frantic efforts to destroy something, real or imaginary.

"Ah, he's a vicious brute," Morality heard the ranchero say; "I've been teasin' him here all day; now watch him."

The ranchero uttered a low, bellowing sound that caused the bull to desert from his attack on the cage and listen. Then he turned, and with his tail up, his head down, and his tongue out, he came charging across the pen with a fierce bellow, and finally came up with a crash against the side of the stockade, causing the shanty to fairly tremble.

The guards burst into a peal of laughter, then, with

a heavy whip, the ranchero scored the poor, mad brute until it was forced to retreat with the blood trickling from its sides.

"Again the men laughed, then the regulator said: 'That's one of the bulls you're going to fight to-night, is it?'"

"That's the only one," was the reply; "it's to be a bull and lion fight."

"A bull and lion fight!" exclaimed the regulator, "well, that's better yet, I'll swear it is."

"Yes; the boys caught a mountain lion, as they're called, when up in California, and started right off to the States with it on a showin' expedition, but by the time they got this far on their way they got sick of the enterprise, and sold out their lion to Rome Fagan and then hired to him to herd cattle. 'Rome got the lion on purpose to chew up that bull, and I do hope he'll claw the very innards outen the horned cuss, for he's the wickedest bull that was ever calved on Texan soil.'"

"I reckon you fellows have made him so," said the regulator.

"Not a bit of it, Cube; not a bit of it, sir; he's a royal hellyon from the ground up, and killed his man afore he war a year old. We'd 'a' killed him long ago, but we s'posed he'd get better—more docile, and then he was sich a promisin' critter. But, thunder! he's grown vicious all the time, and 's' killed a dozen or two head of cattle, disembowled three mustangs and killed two herders. Oh, he's a wicked scamp. I've seed him stand fight his own shadder till he drueled at the mouth. Ye see he's got sich infernal long horns, and then they're just as sharp as the p'int of a Mexican dagger. I tell ye he'll make a stiff ole fight; I'll bet he'll hold that tiger or lion a square tussle, and I wouldn't be afraid to go you a few that he gits away with the critter. He may not, though, for we've been stuffin' the lion on young calves for a week or two, and I'll tell ye what he's got a tooth for beefsteak rare. There! d'ye hear that? that was ole California's growl; he's in that pen over yander where the bull's cavortin' now."

"H' avens, I thought that growlin' war thunder!" exclaimed the regulator; "and so that war the lion's voice?"

"It war, for a sweet fact."

"Well, judgin' by that, the bull won't be a mouthful for the lion."

"Don't deceive yourself on that point, Cube, for I think it'll be the toughest old fight that ever took place in the San Saba valley. And won't it be delicious fun? whew-ee!"

At this juncture a man appeared from the cabins bringing the guards and prisoner some supper. They passed Morality's in to him upon a plate, and while the guards were eating, the other ranchero asked:

"You haven't heard the latest, have you, boys?"

"What about?"

"The bull-fight to-night; well, it's been decided that a man shall fight the victor, be it bull or lion."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the guards.

"Yes, the Spanish blood of Senor Fagando and the French wit of Rocheford have arrived at an arrangement that'll equal any of old Spain's royal entertainments. Oh, it'll jist be gorgeous!"

"Well, don't tantalize a feller, but tell us all 'bout it. Who's the reckless man that's going to risk his hide in a confab with a bull or lion?"

"Why, sir," said the ranchero, "the man you guard. Old Morality's to be placed upon a horse and turned into the pen, and compelled to fight or die."

"Thunder rolling! the old man'll not stand a shin ow of a chance with the bull or lion."

"Not a shadow," replied the ranchero; "but then we'll have the sport just the same, don't you see?"

Old Morality heard the ranchero's words, and the news he brought with their supper from headquarters, but instead of breaking down under the startling information, he calmly ate his supper and paced his narrow prison, whistling softly to himself.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BULL AND LION FIGHT.

It was night at Fagan's Ranch, but in and around the pens where the fight was soon to come off, the light of a dozen flambeaux lit up the arena with a glare as bright almost as the noonday sun. Dr. Rocheford and his followers and the rancheros were seated upon a platform on top of the stockade, waiting for the sport to begin.

The lion in his cage was being goaded to frenzy, while men with red lanterns, stationed at different points around the pens, were teasing and tormenting the bull into fury and madness.

Shouts of laughter and the commanding voices of men mingled with the bellowing of the bull and the sullen roar of the lion.

From the door of the elevated watch-house Old Morality was permitted to witness the preparations for the struggle.

In the course of an hour the "committee on arrangements" announced all in readiness for the fight to begin. A man with a red lantern stood on top of the lion's cage, and another with a rope in his hand stood by his side; the rope was fastened to the door of the lion's cage and passed over a pulley.

"Ready!" shouted the man with the rope; then the one with the red lantern lowered the light by means of a rope and swung it to and fro before the door of the lion's cage. The bull caught sight of it, shook his head, pawed the earth and then with a howl started across the arena. As he neared the subject of his wrath, the man with the rope raised the

A dead hush fell upon the crowd. Old Morality imagined he could hear the voices of the night out in the wood, so profound was the silence. Every eye was fixed in burning suspense upon the lion's cage.

Then a growl and a bellow breaks the silence. There is a rush in the lion's cage, and the fierce animal springs out into the arena. A shout bursts from the lips of the rancheros and regulators.

Crouching upon the earth the lion gazes around him, his green eyes blazing with rage, his jaws open and dripping with froth, and his tail slowly lashing the ground. He utters a growl—a challenge. The bull shakes his mane, utters a deep, short bellow, and with his tail up, his eyes blazing, and his mouth open and tongue protruding, he rushes upon the lion.

They came together with a dull crash, a scream and a roar. With a leap the agile lion met his horned antagonist, and landed fairly between the animal's wide horns and buried his fearful claws in the shoulders and his teeth in the shaggy neck. With a bellow that was almost deafening and pitiful, the bull went down upon his knees. He had been taken at a disadvantage. The lion clung to him as if fastened there. In vain the bull tried to shake him off, but his weight almost overcame the strength of his antagonist. But at length the bull rose from his knees and charged across the arena with the lion still clinging to his neck and shoulders.

The crowd, mad with excitement, shouted at the top of their lungs and waved their hats.

"A thousand dollars to ten that the lion whips the bull!" Dr. Rocheford shouted across the arena to a friend.

Before that friend could reply Old Morality yelled out:

"I'll take you, frog-eater; come over and ante."

"If you've ten dollars, I'll take it, anyhow," replied Rocheford.

A frightful bellow and a subdued growl drew attention to the combatants, when a shout again arose from the spectators' line, for the situation had changed. The lion had broke his hold and had been hurled over the bull's back to the ground with fearful violence.

The bull, with torn, bleeding shoulders, starting eyeballs and steaming nostrils turned, and again rushed upon his foe. The lion made a second spring, but this time it was not so fortunate, for its body came in contact with the sharp horn of the bull, and was impaled thereon.

A roar that fairly shook the earth escaped the lion's fearful lungs, and he sunk back, almost paralyzed by the cruel horn ranking in his body. With a snort and a roar, the bull gave a sudden toss of the head and the lion was disemboweled. Still, in the agonies of death the fierce animal fought on, apparently more desperate than ever; but this could not last long, and in a few minutes the lion lay a quivering lump of flesh, torn, bleeding and dead.

The bull had won the battle.

Hats were swung in the air and shouts rung through the night.

"What an awful fool you are, Rocheford!" yelled Old Morality.

"You'll think different soon, my festive vagabond," replied the irate Frenchman.

A red light was lowered and swung to and fro to entice the bull away from the carcass of the lion. Then several men slipped into the arena, attached a rope to the dead animal and dragged it out.

Then a silence prevailed. Old Morality shuddered, for he knew what was to come next; but he determined to meet his fate without yielding a point.

Five minutes or more had elapsed when two men ascended a ladder to the watch-house, opened the door, unfastened the old man and bade him follow them.

He was conducted down the ladder, around the cattle-pens and into one of the more pretentious of the many log cabins. A light burned on the table in the middle of the room, and by the table sat Dr. Jules Rocheford and a man in a mask. The latter Old Morality believed was Jerome Fagan, who, against his will, was forced to take sides with the robber in what was to follow.

"Well, old man," said the regulator, "how have you enjoyed the sports of the evening?"

"Very well, indeed, but I'd enjoyed it better to have seen you tossed on that bull's horns," was the old man's reply.

"No doubt of it, sir; but I have a proposition to make you."

"What is it? for you to fight me?"

"Not exactly, sir."

"No, for you are too great a coward."

"Be that as it may, there are terms upon which you can purchase your liberty, Morality."

"I am faring very well, my fine frog-eater," retorted Morality.

"You'll accept of no proposition then?"

"It's immaterial to me what becomes of me, I assure you."

"Well," said Rocheford, "I will say this much to you: we will furnish you a horse and spear with which to enter that arena and slay that bull, and if you succeed, you go free."

"And if the bull wins I'll go free! Ha! ha! it's the same either way," replied the old ranger.

"Do you accept?"

"I accept nothing at your hands."

"Then you will have to fight, anyhow, or die!" was Rocheford's reply, and he called armed men who conducted the old man out into the yard. Here a horse, saddled and bridled was in waiting for him.

"Mount that horse," ordered one of the men.

The old man hesitated not the order.

"Will you mount that horse? or shall we assist you?" demanded Rocheford in a stern voice.

The old man leaped nimbly into the saddle.

"Tie him to the horse, now," commanded Rocheford.

"No, give me a chance, man!" cried the old ranger, "give me a chance and I will enter the arena."

"Ah! he weakens; he will fight! There now, hand him the lance. You need not tie him, for he'll better fight with free use of himself. Glorious sport! splendid fun! lead on the horse to the gate of the arena."

A man led the horse around to the entrance, the regulators following behind with pistols in hand. There were two gates to the entrance to the Wild Pen, one opening inward and the other opening outward with a space of a foot between the two. The outer gate was locked, the inner gate fastened by a hook dropped in a staple.

The outer gate was unlocked and pulled open, the inner gate unfastened and pushed open.

The attention of the bull having been drawn, by a red light, to the opposite side of the arena, a man led in the horse upon which was seated the unwilling matador, lance in hand. A shout hailed the old man's entrance. In a moment the gates were closed, and Old Morality was alone with the maddened bull!

The man who wore the mask in the cabin carried the key that locked the gate, and when he turned the key upon the old man, he did not, with the others, hasten to a point where he could see the conflict, but turned and walked away into the shadows, as if ashamed of what he had done—as if quickened conscience was already upbraiding him.

Old Morality took in the situation at a glance. He saw that there was no escape for him—no pitying eye among the many looking down upon him. His horse was old, and lame, and stiff in the joints. The first onset of the bull would destroy it.

The old man's situation was, indeed, precarious, but he betrayed no emotions of fear to his enemies. Yet his hand trembled. The fire and vigor of youth were not there to support the resolute and unbending spirit that age could not impair. Time had sapped much of the vitality of his once powerful and athletic form, and yet he felt that he was the equal of any man in point of physical strength. He had nothing but contempt for his enemies, and as he now more fully realized their cowardice and cruelty, he lifted his eyes and shouted, in a clear, distinct voice:

"Fellow-beings, your sports are those of cowards; not one of you dare fight me, old as I am, and yet you turn your maddened beasts upon me. God will smite you for such cowardice."

A peal of jeering laughter burst from the lips of the spectators, then the red lights were all withdrawn but a single one which was lowered and swung, directly behind the old ranger. The bull saw it and started toward it, and it was then that it discovered the presence of another enemy in the arena. Stopping, it began pawing the earth and bellowing, then shaking its head, it started toward the horse. The old matador endeavored to spur the horse out of its way, but it came like a hurricane and struck the horse fairly in the side, driving its cruel horns deep into the animal's flank and disemboweling it in an instant. The horse rolled over upon its side, uttering an almost human scream of agony. Old Morality endeavored to impale the bull with his lance, but the shaft, a cruel deception, snapped in two where it had been "ringed," and he was left unarmed!

Springing to the ground clear of the stirrups, as the horse went down, he ran across the arena. The bull did not see him. It was too busy with the poor old horse.

The crowd shouted like demons. The red lanterns were swung from the wall to draw the attention of the bull to the man.

The horse struggled to his feet and attempted to flee; but he could not evade the bull, and soon he was down again, to rise no more.

The horse dead, it was no trouble to attract the bull with the lights, and the one nearest the old matador was swung rapidly to and fro. The mad beast seeing it, went lunging across the arena toward it. Old Morality darted swiftly out of its way, for he was weaponless. The spectators jeered him. It seemed impossible that human beings could become so depraved, so merciless, so inhuman.

The victim lifted his face and ran his eyes along the line of spectators. Some of them were swinging their hats, and some were standing in attitudes of suspense. Among all was there not one to pity him—to help him? As he asked himself these questions a voice seemed to whisper: "Run to the gate!" Just then the bull saw him and darted toward him. Running backward the old man approached the gate. He thought, perhaps, they would let him out, seeing he was completely at the mercy of the brute. In his excitement he passed the gate a rod or more, and the bull was almost upon him. His heel struck a clod; he stumbled and fell. With head lowered and tail erect the bull plunged toward him. As it passed the entrance to the pen, the gate swung partially open and the life figure of a man sprang into the arena behind the bull with a sword in hand. There was a downward flash of the weapon, and the bull halted—another flash, and the animal sunk back upon its haunches, both hands and legs severed!

Old Morality sprang to his feet.

"This way, Morality!" cried the voice of his rescuer.

The old man ran toward his friend and the open gate.

And on the way to liberty he met Little Texas, the Boy Lasso-thrower, and together the two glided out of the arena and away into the shadows of the night!

CHAPTER XII.

ADRIEN ON THE PRAIRIE.

NEELY had the Boy Mustanger wielded his sword—the gift of Don Rossevan—in the cause of right—in the cause of human life.

A howl of rage and disappointment, mingled with a few faint shouts of joy, rung out upon the night from the lips of the spectators. In the light of the flambeau, the regulators in particular had recognized Little Texas, and his name was rung upon a dozen lips. A dozen revolvers leaped from their holsters and a random fire opened upon the youth and the old ranger; but the bullets rattled harmlessly against the stockade, for in a moment the two were out of the pen and beyond the radius of light, and none of the enemy being near the gate, they made good their escape.

"This way, Morality," whispered the Boy Mustanger, when under cover of the darkness; and then he led the old man, by a circuitous route to a dense clump of timber back of the stables where Lightfoot and another horse were in waiting.

"Here, Morality, I've a horse for you, old pard," cried the boy; "mount, and let's make ourselves scarce in these parts, for it'll soon be hotter'n a turnip's nest."

Old Morality was so rejoiced and so excited that he could make no reply, but mounting the horse followed the Young Centaur.

They rode on in silence until they had reached the open prairie and assured themselves they were beyond immediate danger. Then Little Texas reined in his animal and rode by Morality's side.

"Good-evening, old pard," the lad said, "business has been so pressing that I haven't had time to speak to you before."

"God bless you! give me your hand, you angelic little cuss," responded the old ranger, in language more fervent than elegant; "if that is a child on earth, I adore just now, it's you. Boy, you are a first-class jewel, and have a faculty of dove-tailin' yourself into a fiery, devilclucky jist like the farmer or gardener that's alers on hand, to rescue the good little boy from the brook in Sunday-school books. Little Texas—Mighty Young Mustanger and Lasso-thrower! I thank you from the very bottom of my old heart!"

"Oh, never mind that, Morality; I'm only too glad to know you are safe. A moment later and you'd have been a goner."

"I know it, I know it; and it makes one grateful to a friend that has sandwiched himself between him and eternity on a moment's time. Oh, it was delicious, boy, the way you sailed in there—but it's a question with me how you got in."

"I got in there in a rather singular way, Morality, and to tell you the story I must go back to the time of your capture. I was not far away when the regulators took you in and marched you off this way, and so I concluded to follow them and see what they meant to do; and you can judge of my surprise when I saw them ride into Fagan's Ranch unharmed. I've known Mr. Fagan some time—have insoosed many and many a wild steer for him, and only last summer I took a job of catchin' two dozen wild mustangs for him, and I alers considered him an honest man. But I saw them imprison you in the elevated watch-house, and made up my mind to git you out of there as soon as darkness set in. You see I didn't know anything 'bout the bull and lion fight, but when I saw 'em fixin' up platforms and lightin' torches I knowed somethin' war up. Well, the fight came off; from the branches of a tree I saw the Spanish sport, then I saw 'em take you out of the watch-house, and with what I heard in sportin' around, I knew what was up, and began to stew and b'lie. I saw them take you into the pen; I saw a man—the one who wore a mask on—"

"That war Fagan, Texas, I'll bet a flip!" interrupted Morality.

"Never mind who you think it was," continued Fagan, "but I saw the man with the mask unlock the gate and let you in, and then I saw him lock the gate upon you. Now, sir, my fingers just burned to get hold of that key, and to git the key was to git the man first. I didn't want to kill the man for I saw he wasn't a regulator; but, as luck would have it, he marched right straight into the brush where I was hid just as if he wanted to conceal his guilty conscience; but what do you suppose that man come there for? to kill himself? to hide the key to the cattle-pen gate? No; he come there to pray. It's a God's fact, he went upon his knees and prayed that you, you, Morality, might escape, and that the hand of justice would forever rid the country of such men as Black Boniface and his followers. Oh, I tell you it was a rattlin' good prayer; showed he'd been used to it. It done me good—it strengthened me. I tell you there is strength in prayer, and I felt like shoutin' when that man made some splendid bids, and when he had finished I couldn't, to save my soul, keep from sayin' 'Amen!' out loud. Gracious! you'd ought to 'a' seen him jump and start to run; but I said: 'I am Little Texas,' and was there to help the Lord fulfill his prayer. 'Now,' says I, 'give me that key, and I will endeavor to save the old man.' Without a word he pulled out the key and give it to me. Then I went for the gate, and he went down upon his knees again, and for all I know he's there yet. The rest you know, Morality."

"Yes, yes; and glory to King David! Boy, that isn't another youngster in Texas that can equal you!" exclaimed the old man; "but say, don't you think that man in the mask was Fagan?"

"Whoever he was, he's to be pitied for his moral cowardice," was the evasive reply; "he will receive them regulators and treat them kindly just to keep them from robbing him; and this is the way they take advantage of him. It's a shame."

"Another question, boy; I see you sport a sword; where did you run across such a tool as that?"

"I earned it."

"Oh, you did, eh?—bin doin' somethin' for somebody else, eh?"

"Yes; I rescued a lady and gentleman to-day from death or injury by catchin' their runaway horses. They were crossin' the prairie and their driver had been suddenly killed by ambushed Indians, and away went their horses lickety-to-kill over the plain."

"The kissin' Judas! what war a man and woman doin' in a rig o' that kind in this kentry?"

"He was taking the lady from the San Saba valley to his home across the prairie."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Morality, something of the truth beginning to dawn upon his confused mind, "what war his name?"

"Juan de Rossevan."

"Great horned gallinippers! de Rossevan and Miss Edith Clayton, I presume?" said the old man, interrogatively.

"Ah, I see you know him, Morality."

"Know him? I should think I did, boy; I have been his scout and spy and secret agent for five years, but, I'll swear to man, you are the first stranger I ever breathed the fact to, and I hope you'll hold your peace on the Don's account for he's a noble feller; and I guess he don't want the folks over in Spain to know where he is, just yet awhile."

"Secrecy is my motto, Morality; but as I was going to say, Don Rossevan gave me this sword."

"A worthy present, boy, for that sword has a history. Royal hands have clasped it, hundreds of years ago. It is said that Don Rossevan's ancestors wore it at the court of Isabella and Ferdinand, and that it has come down an heirloom in the Rossevan family. It's a wonder that Don Juan would part with it. It's worth thousands, boy, for the hit's set with diamonds and—"

"What? I thought it was glass or stone," replied Little Texas.

"Diamonds, boy, diamonds; you're rich in jewels. But look here, boy, you know you left me rather sudden, 'other night; I've been dyin' to ask you how you come out in your pursuit of old Boniface and that girl."

"I caught old Bonny and—"

"Checked him for perdition?"

"No, I had no time to stop and shoot him; I thought more of saving the girl than of killin' him, for the saving of the life of such a girl as she is was worth more to me than the destruction of a million such critters as Black Boniface."

"Old Dr. Dover told me she was an angel of a little critter."

"Yes, Morality; but she is now—well, God only knows where. I have been hunting her since yesterday morning; we became separated near my cabin in the dark, and where she went to I know not. I know this much, however; she is not in the power of Rocheford's party."

"Dye know anything about ole Bonny himself?"

"Nothing."

"That gal must be found, then," said Old Morality.

"Yes; I shall never rest until I know where she is, whether she be dead or alive," replied the young Lasso-thrower.

"Texas," said Morality, as a thought suddenly occurred to him, "let's cut a bee-line for the Ruins of Rossevan. Once there and the Don'll furnish us men and horses to search and scout this country over for the gal."

"How far away is it, Morality?"

"We can make it by breakfast."

"So near?—then lead the way, and I will follow."

Thus was their course determined, and they turned in the direction of the Ruins de Rossevan. The night was not half gone, and the moon, drifted serenely through the tender blue sky.

About midnight the two dismounted to rest and allow their tired animals to graze. They sat down in the tall grass and talked in low tones. They talked for nearly an hour or more, and were about to resume their journey, when the sound of hoof-strokes fell upon their ears. Starting to their feet they discovered a horseman approaching. Old Morality challenged him. He drew rein and answered:

"Alvrez, Senor Morality." He had recognized the ranger by his voice.

An exclamation of delight burst from the old man's lips. Alvrez was one of Don Rossevan's followers. The two friends advanced and clasped hands. Morality introduced his young companion, and the Spaniard uttered a little cry of surprise when he heard the boy's name mentioned.

"Little Texas!" he exclaimed, looking close into the boy's face; "then I have a message for you, senor."

"From whom, Alvrez?" asked the boy.

"Senorita Miles, senor."

"Christie Miles?" exclaimed the boy, with a start.

"The same, senor; she wished me to say to you, if I should meet you, that she is safe at the Ruins de Rossevan, where she will be delighted to see you soon."

Little Texas tossed his cap in the air and uttered a shout of joy.

"By the kissin' Judas, boy, I b'lieve you're in love with that gal, Little Texas," declared Old Morality.

"I'll bet you'd be, too, if you'd see what an angel she is," answered Texas.

"Bah, my boy, I scoured on love years and years ago; still, I like a pretty girl—they're nice to have around," replied Old Morality; then turning to Alvrez, continued: "Where you going, Alv?"

"To the San Sal; I go with a message from the guest of Don Rossevan to his friends in camp there."

They are to move at once to the Ruins de Rossevan and make it the nucleus of their colony."

"You don't tell me, Alvrez! Why, what's got the matter with your young master?" asked Old Morality.

"Ah, senor! I think he loves the pretty lady with the soft blue eyes and the golden hair—she who was in the *calesa* when the Little Texas caught the runaway team on the plain."

"I don't blame him for that, either," declared Morality. "I see that woman with my own eyes, and she's nice enough for any king on the footstool; she's sister to your gal, Tex."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the young Texan, in surprise.

Alvrez did not tarry long with the ranger and mustanger, but continued his journey toward the San Saba; while Little Texas and Old Morality mounted their horses and continued on toward the Ruins de Rossevan at a steady pace.

A great weight had been lifted from the Boy Lasso-thrower's heart, and for the first time in many days he found himself without a care upon his mind, or an especial object to pursue; and, thus relieved, his thoughts were free to roam in the realms of fancy. Christie Miles was the first object to come up before his mind's eye, and his boyish heart beat joyously over the thought of meeting her soon, and that, too, under circumstances never presented before—in the midst of friends, and away from the dangers and terrors of wood and plain—where her woman's nature undisturbed by fear and excitement would shine forth in all its wondrous beauty and gentle love. It was, indeed, a happy thought.

When morning dawned it found the two some distance from their destination; but moving on they finally reached a little creek where they stopped to water their horses and make their ablutions. Then, our little friend arranged his clothing, combed his long yellow locks back from his forehead and temples, and even with this hastily made and simple toilet, the appearance of the little mustanger was greatly improved. It gave a renewed luster to his eyes and freshness to his cheeks.

Mounting their horses the two moved on and finally came in sight of the Ruins de Rossevan.

"Ay!" exclaimed the boy, "I have been near this place many times, and heard of yonder ruins, but never saw them before. What a huge old pile it is! Colonel Hayes was telling me once about the people that built these ruins—Jesuits, I think he called them. Up in New Mexico their lots of them tumbled around. The colonel said this country was once peopled and wealthy; but the hand of the invader desolated it, and gave it back to the savage and outlaw, the wolf and the owl."

"Yes, this land has a history, boy," replied Old Morality—"a history written in blood and fire. The curse of God seems to have fallen upon it as it fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah; but, unlike those stricken places, the day is not far distant when it will be reclaimed from ruin and robbers, and out of the ashes of the invaders' torch will spring, Phoenix-like, the fairest land and grandest improvements the country ever saw."

"I am surprised at Rossevan settling down in this dismal old ruin 'mong dangers and privations," said the mustanger.

"No doubt of it, boy; but you'd ort to 'a' seed the place when he first come here. Scarcely one stone lay upon another, and everything was overgrown and infested by coyotes, owls, serpents and bats. The Don rebuilt one wing of the building, cleared off the yard and planted oranges, and oleanders, and peaches, and flowers, and thus turned desolation into a little chunk of a paradise."

"I see now that the place has been repaired and rebuilt, and that, too, so as to preserve the aspect of ruins," said Texas, "but—"

"Good-morning, Daco!" suddenly exclaimed Old Morality.

They had arrived at the gate of the great stone wall, or quadrilateral, surrounding the buildings; and here they drew rein and dismounted. A colored man was there and took their horses. Then Daco, the guard, opened the gate and admitted them to the grounds. A nice graveled walk led up to the door of the old mission-house. Orange trees and oleanders lent the fragrance of their bloom to the peach and the rose that bloomed upon every side.

The Lasso-thrower was surprised, astonished.

"Great sun of the temple!" he exclaimed, "that is a sort of a second-hand paradise, ain't it, Morality? I declare, if I war a robber or an Inghin, I'd be tempted to plunder it—rout the Don, and take possession, myself."

"It's a lovely place, Texas, and the people that live here add another peccoliar charm to it. It's a garden bloomin' in a wilderness, my boy."

The two proceeded slowly up the walk toward the building. Pears were passing to and fro about the door in performance of their morning duties. Birds chattered merrily in the trees overhead. The air was rife with the intoxicating perfume of flowers. The walk was strewn with orange bloom.

Little Texas's heart began to throb, wildly. A few steps more, and he would stand in the presence of Don Rossevan, Colonel Israel Miles, Edith, the beautiful heroine of the *calesa*, and of her whose presence had not been absent from his heart or mind, since they parted, Christie Miles! Old Morality noticed the youth's emotions. He saw the color coming into the brown face, and his lips twitching, nervously; but never in all his life did he look upon a more manly young cavalier, with his straight form, his well-polished head, his long yellow hair gathered back from an intellectual brow, his great brown eyes, and, withal, his bearing of princely grace and manhood.

As the two approached the ruins, the sound of

voices fell upon their ears, and three persons appeared around a clump of shrubbery and stood face to face before them. It was Colonel Miles and his two daughters, Edith and Christie.

At sight of the two strangers coming so suddenly and unexpectedly upon them, the three involuntarily started back; then Christie, with a quick glance at her father, and then at the intruders, uttered a little cry of joy, and forgetting that the others were present—obeying the promptings of her own childish heart—left her friends and flying to Little Texas, threw her arms about the boy's neck and kissed his brown cheek, while tears of pure joy filled her glorious eyes.

"Christie! Christie!" cried the colonel, sternly, "what do you mean, my child?"

"Oh, uncle Israel!" cried the maiden, turning and clasping her little hands with joy, "this is Little Texas!"

"Little Texas?" yelled the stormy old colonel, "this Little Texas? Then kiss him again, Christie, for me. Boy give me your hand!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE AT THE RUINS DE ROSSEVAN.

A DAY had passed since the arrival of Old Morality and the Boy Mustang at the Ruins of Rossevan, and found our hero still there, resting from the labor and excitement of the past few days, and basking in the social sunlight of the good people of the ruins, and feasting his heart upon the glories of a new existence that his acquaintance with Christie Miles had seemed to open unto him.

Colonel Miles had so far recovered as to be able to ride out; but he was still weak and feeble and dared not venture beyond the inclosure unless attended by some one.

Anita, the beautiful and accomplished sister of Don Rossevan, proved herself an admirable hostess and entertaining companion. Indoors Edith and Christie were treated to music, poetry, paintings, books of travel and history; while outdoors they were led amid profusions of flowers, under silvan shades where bright-eyed birds sung and twittered in glee.

Don Rossevan was also an entertaining host and companion, and did everything in his power to make his visitors happy and comfortable. His great penchant was for fine horses, of which he possessed a score of all colors and breeds; and his daily wont was to harness a span of these to his calesa and drive his lady friends about the ruins, and point out to them the almost obliterated landmarks of that faithful people that once dwelt in the land. He would also drive them to his great herds upon the prairie, and entertain them with displays of horsemanship on the part of his Mexican peons, some of whom seemed born in the saddle, and would take a wild horse from the corral and ride it without saddle or bridle.

Altogether there was quite enough of the dead past and present, the rude and the beautiful, and the ideal and material about the ruins to inspire them with an air of picturesque grandeur and romantic beauty. It was a place that possessed a strange, mysterious attraction and wild, weird fascination to Colonel Miles and his daughters. In fancy they walked with the ill-fated people of ages gone, and conversed with Jesuit and proselyte. They stood under cedars and oak that had no doubt sheltered the hosts of the Spanish invader. They walked by the stream flowing through the grounds and listened to the same murmuring song it no doubt sung for Aztec maid and Aztec lover.

The building, or mansion-house, was in strange contrast with the people that dwelt within it. It bore the marks of ages gone, yet it was the home of beauty and refinement of the present. It was a broken stalk blooming in a deserted, desolate garden—an oasis in a great desert. It was located in an out-of-the-way place, though in the century past the mission might have been on a great thoroughfare running from the capital of the Montezumas to the Seven Cities of the Cibola. It was this seclusion, along with its ghostly air of desolation that seemed to keep watch and ward over the approach to the place—that had kept red-skin and robber away from it so long; and it was for this very reason—because red-man and outlaw shunned it with superstitious dread—that Don Rossevan had selected it for his home. He had rebuilt the walls of the mission and the quadrilateral; he had cleared the grounds of its rank growth of vegetation, and planted trees and flowers of nearly every description known to the salubrious climate of the South-west; and in a short time had, in a measure, reclaimed the ruin from its desolation.

Time passed pleasantly indeed at the ruins after Edith and Christie had joined their guardian there. Don Rossevan was unremitting in his attentions to Edith, and it was evident enough to all that she encouraged him in it; and so one day found them seated together at an open window overlooking the grounds and the distant forest, engaged in a pleasant conversation.

The day was beautiful, and the scene before them lovely in the extreme. Around the ruins, and before them, lay the dark greenwood of cedar and oak. The wind drifted lazily from the south laden with the odor of the orange and the oleander, and the fragrance of the wild-wood.

Edith Clayton never looked more charming than she did upon this occasion; and yet there was an expression of sadness in her voice. Don Rossevan studied her features closely, and one would have seen by the look of admiration in his fine, dark eyes, the flush upon his face, and the tremor upon his lips, that his usual spirits had undergone a

change—that the emotions of his heart were leading him a captive to the shrine of woman's beauty and woman's love.

Edith was a great admirer of nature, and as she gazed out over the grounds, the stone wall, and the green wood reaching away into the tender blue sky, she said:

"When you became a recluse, Mr. Rossevan, you chose a very picturesque as well as isolated home."

"I will admit, senorita, that it is a far more romantic spot than I had at first perceived; I selected the place solely upon account of its desolate loneliness, its security, and remaining buildings."

"But why did you choose a ruin and its desolation when there were plenty of broad, fertile valleys in Texas inviting the settler?"

"I chose this, senorita, because it was a ruin, knowing that the Indian and outlaw have a superstitious dread of these places."

"And you enjoy this life? This living here, shut out from the gay society, the pleasures and enjoyments of the world?"

"I prefer this, by far, to a Spanish prison, senorita; and since I have come here and adapted myself to the circumstances surrounding me, I have come to like this sort of life."

"Spanish prison!" exclaimed Edith, "do you mean to tell me that you are a—fugitive from justice, Mr. Rossevan?"

"Your people would call me a political offender—nothing more. I dared to raise my voice, and would have raised my sword, against the crowned tyranny of Spain, and for this was I condemned to death; but I escaped and fled to America—to this glorious republic where I could breathe the air of freedom—where a man could speak his thoughts and yet be safe in life and property. Many of my old retainers and servants came with me, and many others have joined me here. Old Morality was my first American acquaintance and friend. I found him at Galveston, speaking the Spanish language well. He has been with me ever since—he is an odd, strange old man. So far as our international laws are concerned, Spain could not have demanded me, as a political offender, of the United States, and I could have settled in St. Louis or Washington, or anywhere, but for one thing: I knew if my whereabouts should become known, my enemies, the emissaries of my native country, would hunt me down in secret, and if there was no way to get me back to Spain, they would assassinate me. You have no idea of the extent to which Spanish vengeance will go, even in an offense like mine. Still I do not regret what I have done. I would do so again were I to live my life over. I am a liberty-loving man."

"Then I am surprised that you will, after living here for years and becoming attached to this place, permit others to come and share it with you, and publish your whereabouts to the world, and your enemies," Edith remarked.

"My dear senorita," the young recluse replied, his voice full of emotion, "there is an attraction in Colonel Israel Miles's party that makes me very desirous of their location by me."

Edith blushed crimson; she knew that the young Spaniard meant—her heart told her; and yet his words seemed to give her pain. She remained silent for several moments. She glanced out over the landscape; the past came back with a bitter remembrance to her mind. Finally she spoke:

"Oh, it would be too bad if your kindness to us should break up the peace and quietude of your happy, secluded home, Mr. Rossevan."

"Fate decrees the good and evil of our lives, senorita; the will of that inevitable fate decreed that your guardian, that you and your sister should become my guests—that I should love you, Edith."

"Oh, sir," Edith exclaimed, "I am unworthy of any man's love," and tears gathered in her eyes.

"Senorita!" he exclaimed, impetuously, "you are worthy of the love of a king; and it has been with no little hesitation that I, a poor exile here, have dared to declare my love to you, Oh, senorita! do not turn me away from you; since the day of our memorable ride over the plain I have loved you, and entertained the hope that my love might be reciprocated."

Edith's eyes were bent downward, while a mingled expression of pain and joy overspread her face. With nervous fingers she picked to pieces the orange bloom that her gallant lover had given her. A tear fell upon her lap.

"I could be nothing but a friend to you, Juan," she murmured, "even though I loved you dearly."

"Oh, my fair lady, do not tell me this!" he cried, impassionately.

"It is true, Juan."

"Then you love another?"

"I do not."

"Then you do not love me," he said, a little bitterly, but with an air of resignation.

"I did not say so, Juan; I meant that I could never be your wife—not now," she responded.

Rossevan took courage. "Not now," he repeated, in his mind, for there was a faint spark of hope in these two words.

"Oh, I shall continue to live in hopes!" he finally exclaimed, rising to his feet and pacing the room with restless impatience; "when we have known each other longer, I feel that you will say that you can be my wife."

"Oh, Juan!" she cried, lifting her tearful eyes to his, "you know not what I mean—what stands between our happiness and—"

"Brother! brother!" an excited voice suddenly broke in, and Anita burst in upon them in great excitement; Senor Morality wishes to see you below at once! I am so afraid something is wrong!"

"Excuse me, senorita," he said to Edith, and with a bow he took his hat and left the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

DISTRESSING NEWS.

Down in the yard by the front door Dr. Rossevan found Old Morality waiting his coming.

"What is wrong, Morality?" he exclaimed.

"Senor, in scoutin' in the woods this morning I discovered an Indian skulkin' near the north wall of the quadrilateral. I followed him, watching his movements, and saw him join two white men whom I recognized by the white bands on their hats as being Boniface regulators."

"Curamb!" exclaimed Rossevan fiercely, "we must keep watch on these ludrones! Morality, look well to the herds, the cattle-pens and stables, and see that every man is armed and upon the alert. To-morrow Colonel Miles's party will be added to our force, and then we can defy the hosts of Boniface and War-Ax."

The faithful old man went away to fulfill his master's orders, accompanied by his young friend, Little Texas; while Don Rossevan, filled with doubt and fear, began pacing restlessly to and fro beneath the shadows of some trees. His thoughts naturally drifted back to Edith Clayton. He repeated in his mind her words, and pondered long over them. While thus engaged he was joined by Colonel Miles.

"Well, my dear friend, you seem thoughtful this morning," the bluff old colonel said.

"I am, colonel, for they tell me enemies are lurking near."

"The deuce you say, senor! Well, by Jove, I'm ready to fight again, and if my friends get in tonight or to-morrow, we'll make Black Boniface and those red devils believe there's a little Therapylas here. I tell you, senor, I've some men that'll fight like Spartans."

"I am delighted to hear it, colonel, for with them and my men we need have no fear," replied Rossevan.

Then the two men sat down under the shadows of an orange and talked long and earnestly.

The day wore away, night came and went and another day dawned upon the Ruin de Rossevan.

Late that day Colonel Miles and Little Texas were walking in the grounds near the entrance to the inclosure. The colonel was restless and uneasy. His train had not yet arrived, and it should have been there by noon. He had not even heard from it.

"I'm afraid, Texas," the old man said, "that these infernal robbers are troubling them. Don Rossevan instructed the messenger sent to guide them here to come by way of the Sand Ridge Route, it being a nearer and better route."

"I know that route, colonel, and I must say it's a bad one, though I say so with all due respect to Don Rossevan's opinion. It runs over a hot, arid tract of sand over two miles long, and a mile wide. The sand ridge is fringed with mesquit and other bushes, and makes a capital lurking place for Indians and regulators to lay and watch. It was only two years ago that a Government train was attacked there by Indians and destroyed, and I don't know how many times since traders and drovers have been attacked and massacred, and their stock run off. You see the red devils hide in the brush, and when a party is exposed out upon the open ridge they pounce upon them like tigers from their lairs; and I don't like the Sand Ridge Route for that reason. It's nearer here, I presume, but it may be a never-endin' road for somebody, colonel."

"I wish to the Lord I'd known this sooner, Texas; but it's too late now. They're past it now if they ever pass it. But, my boy, how is it Black Boniface hasn't killed you afore this?"

"Tempest, colonel!" laughed the boy, "for a robber to kill a lasso-thrower or ranchero is killin' the goose that lays the golden egg. Robbers and prairie pirates don't ever molest us fellers unless they have to in order to save themselves. It's easier for a mean man to steal than to work, and when we catch wild mustangs and break them, they bounce us, or our traders, and take the horses from us; and it's a good deal the same way with the cattle-herders. That's why they don't trouble us fellows."

"Yes, yes, I see now; they're the eagles of the prairie that prey upon you fish-hawks."

"That's it to a jot, colonel; that very buck-skin that Captain Lucas sold you was a mustang of my own catching; and I'd scarcely got it down before Black Boniface and his whole band bounced me and took my buck-skin and—"

"The lying scoundrel!" exclaimed the colonel.

"But you may risk your wealth on it, colonel," continued the young mustanger, "that they didn't get the horse for nothin'. When I saw them comin', I got ready for their reception, and if I didn't empty three saddles before they came, I hope I may never empty another. But it was like touchin' off a magazine under each one's vest. They fairly snatched the baldheaded, and before we got through with it, I was provoked into strikin' Black Boniface a jolt that made the blood fairly gurgle. Oh, land of the blest! if ever you see'd a man git up and howl it was that man Boniface! He was just going to obliterate me, that he was, but finally decided that the hand that struck him should be out off that night; and so he detailed Dr. Rosseford, his physician and first lieutenant, to do the work. You see that was a lick and a promise, but I didn't give them the chance to fulfill their promise, for I watched the corners and finally gave them the slip. But I tell you, colonel, it's war to the knife now between me and Black Boniface. The country won't hold us both, and I'll be blest if I'm goin' to vacate as long as I've a hot head and a right hand."

"That's the talk, my boy! but do be careful; young people are headstrong and impulsive sometimes."

"I know it, colonel, but it takes all these to head off a robber or lasso a mustanger. For awhile I'm goin' to devote my attention exclusively to Black Bon-

face and his followers. They raided upon my ranch the other night and destroyed everything in the shape of house or corral—in fact, everything that I'd burn. But I reckon Christie told you all about our night up there?"

"Yes, yes, my boy, she did; and I must say you are a very brave and fearless lad. I can never repay you for your kindness to my daughter."

Little Texas laughed in a hearty, boyish strain as he said to himself: "I'll take Christie and call it square;" then to the colonel he said aloud:

"Oh, when a feller works for kindness he don't want pay. I'd just like to rescue Christie every day if we could always come out at the big end of the horn. Great tempest! Christie's got more grit and courage than forty girls, and it'd done your soul good to see how she conducted herself under the most trying circumstances—and Ah! who comes there?"

His question was caused by the sound of clattering hoofs outside the quadrilateral, and a moment later a horseman rode up to the gate, and in an excited tone demanded entrance of the man on guard.

"My God!" cried Colonel Miles, "it is the messenger, Alvarez!"

And Alvarez was the man sent to conduct the colonel's party to the ruins.

The colonel advanced and met the man. The fellow was all excitement. His face and clothes were covered with dirt and dust, and his horse was reeking in foam. He saluted the colonel and Little Texas.

"Senior colonel," he exclaimed, "I have bad news for you!"

"What is it, man? for God's sake, what is it?"

"The train was attacked by Indians and robbers on the Sand Ridge, and after a desecrated battle—"

"Were destroyed?" exclaimed the impatient old man.

"No, senior, not when I left. We drove the enemy back and then went to work and threw up a defense of sand—dug holes in the earth for the women and children, and formed the wagons around all. In that condition I left them under a broiling sun, with but little water in their casks. They will perish with heat and thirst, if not by bullets, unless they are soon relieved. The train is surrounded, and at the risk of my life I dashed through the lines and came for help."

"Help you shall have, so far as it goes," exclaimed Little Texas, "as soon as my horse can carry me to the battle-field!"

"And my muster, I know, will send an armed force to raise the siege," said the excited messenger.

"I shall wait on no one," replied Little Texas; "good-by, colonel!"

Turning, the youth hastened to the house, buckled on his sword, loaded his rifle and pistols, then procuring his horse, mounted it and went flying away at a wild, breakneck speed to the scene of conflict.

Colonel Miles turned and hastened back to the building as fast as his feeble strength would permit.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CLOUDS STILL GATHERING.

WHILE matters on Sand Ridge Route were assuming the condition of a siege, and Little Texas was hastening to the aid of the train, affairs at the Ruins de Rossevan were also overshadowed by a menacing cloud of danger.

While Colonel Miles and the Boy Mustanger were taking their stroll near the entrance to the ground, Don Rossevan and Edith Clayton were seated upon a rustic bench under a cluster of trees a few rods from the entrance of the building. Rossevan had been reading to his fair companion a charming story of old Spain in the days of her pristine glory; but finally growing wearied with this, he closed the book, and turning to Edith, he said:

"Those were the halcyon days of my native land, seniorita, the days of mailed warriors and helmeted knights—days forever gone."

"You should have lived in those days, senior, for they were the days of chivalry," replied Edith.

"Thanks, seniorita, for the compliment, but I must say that I am very glad I live in this age—glad, because it is the age in which you live, Edith."

"You may regret that you have ever known me, Juan," she replied.

"No, no; a Spanish nobleman never forgets that which has given him pleasure and honor. Whatever may be the result of our meeting and our parting, I shall always look back to these days as the brightest and sunniest spot in life's journey."

"I must confess, senior, that our meeting has afforded me both pain and pleasure," said Edith, earnestly, thoughtfully.

"Why has it afforded you pain, Edith?"

"Senior, I cannot tell you."

"I see, Edith, there is some mystery overshadowing your young life; and yet I feel in hopes it is nothing serious—nothing but a mere matter of short acquaintance or national blood that causes you to hesitate, and no doubt prudently, in plighting your hand to me, admitting your regards for me were sufficiently strong to admit of such."

"Juan," she said, with a pleading, imploring look, "I cannot be your wife, nor is it because I do not love, for I do."

"Bless you, seniorita, for those last words; but may I ask you why you cannot be my wife?"

"Because—" she began, but the rest of the sentence was taken from her lips by a stern voice that said:

"Because, she is my wife!"

And a man stepped from behind a clump of bushes and confronted them. The look of a demon was upon his face and in his eyes.

The man was Victor Ure, and Victor Ure was Black Boniface.

Edith uttered a startled cry and sinking back, fell unconscious in her seat. Don Rossevan caught her with one arm while with his right hand he drew his sword.

"*Vuelen, adrone robado!*" he cried in his native tongue; "back, back!" he continued, in English, "do not press upon me or I will run you through!"

Victor Ure laughed coldly, sardonically, and pointing to Edith's drooping form, said:

"Sir Knight of the Ruin, that woman is my wife and I demand you to leave us here alone!"

"Never!" cried the young Spaniard, his eyes flashing with all the fire of his impulsive nature; "upon my honor and this lady's I will fall here before I leave her with a villain!"

"Then, by my soul, you shall fall," replied Victor Ure, drawing his revolver and cocking it, but as he raised it, Don Rossevan sprang forward and with a dexterous pass of his sword picked the weapon out of his hand and sent it flying from him.

An oath of rage and disappointment escaped the villain's lips; but catching the sound of approaching feet a look of devilish triumph overspread his face, and he exclaimed:

"Fight then, will you, sir knight—champion of other men's wives?"

Don Rossevan saw a dozen armed regulators approaching through the shrubbery from the direction of the eastern wall of the quadrilateral, and it flashed upon him in an instant that the enemy had scaled the wall and forced an entrance at that point.

Seeing the imminent danger that he was in, Rossevan drew from his pocket a silver whistle and placing it to his lips gave utterance to a quick, sharp, piercing call.

Almost instantly it was answered, and then from the direction of the house came Old Morality and a score of peons and retainers. They had been in front of the building drilling in the manual of arms, when the call of alarm was given, which accounted for the promptness of their answer.

Seeing their danger, Black Boniface and his men melted away among the shrubbery as if by magic, while Don Rossevan, lifting the faint form of Edith in his arms, carried her to the house; and leaving her in the care of Anita and Christie he hastened back to the grove, where a sharp firing was going on. His men and the robbers, concealing themselves among the shrubbery, were engaged in a kind of guerrilla fight; nor was the combat a bloodless one, for already two or three of the defenders were down, while groans of agony and curses of pain could be heard among the robbers.

Things went on in this way for some minutes without any decided result, when finally Old Morality slipped around to Don Rossevan's side and said:

"Senior, the sooner we end this the better. Boniface has more men, surely, somewhere abouts, and no tellin' what moment they 'll pounce upon us. We hold the winnin' cards now, so far as numbers go, so my advice is to lead out and rout the enemy."

"Sound a charge, Morality, and do as you think best," was the Don's reply, and then he gave a sharp, cutting scream upon his whistle.

Then forth from the bushes plunged the old man shouting to his comrades, and a moment more the retainers and peons of Rossevan were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with the robbers. The battle was fierce, but soon ended, for the force of the Spanish recluses was treble that of the robber.

Black Boniface was seen no more within the inclosure, although Old Morality and Rossevan kept on the look-out for him. His men escaped from the grove into the woods by way of the southern gate, which was found open, and the guard lying dead near it. The sudden disappearance of Boniface, and the actions of his men in their retreat, caused no little speculation in the mind of Don Rossevan, and when the gate was reached, he was joined by Colonel Miles, who hurried from an opposite quarter of the grove to take a hand in the conflict. The two stopped just outside of the gate while Old Morality and his men continued the pursuit.

"The hellyons come at last, did they, Juan?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Yes, senior, and they have been well punished," was the reply.

"Furiat! I broke my neck, almost, trying to get here in time to have a hand in it; but the worst of it is, senior, my train is surrounded by Ingias and robbers on that cursed Sand Ridge, and—"

"Heaven forbid it!" cried Rossevan.

"Oh, but it's so, and Little Texas has gone there a-flying. Your man, Alvarez, brought the word."

"Morality must go with men and assist your friends."

"Great mercy, Rossevan, what is the meaning of that?"

The colonel pointed in the direction of the stables and cattle-pens, which were concealed behind the grove, but from the immediate vicinity of which black smoke was rolling into the heavens.

"Great Dios!" exclaimed Rossevan, his face assuming a look of despair, "have the robbers drawn our attention here while they robbed the casa and fired the stables?"

"God forbid!" cried the colonel, and together the two men started toward the house.

They soon reached the door and there, to their awful horror, they found a female servant lying dead with her head cloven; while from the shrubbery hard by another one came crawling out, a picture of abject terror.

"Oh, my master!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands and moaning, "the ladrones have killed poor Alta, and carried off my poor young mistress and the dear young ladies!"

A groan of bitter anguish escaped the lips of Colonel Miles, and he fairly staggered under the terrible blow.

Don Rossevan muttered something under his breath. His dark eyes blazed with a deadly fire, and his face became contorted and knotted by the twitchings upon it caused by the convulsions of a vengeful heart. His very form seemed to expand with the emotions of his breast. His voice became low and deep, like the sullen voice of the lion pacing his cage. He advanced to the door of the building and looked in. A glance told him that the head of the despoiler had been there. He turned around, looked up at the sun, and then out at the western horizon; but the smoke rising from the burning stables and sheds settled around and above him, shutting out the sky and the distance. He blew a call upon his whistle, and in a few minutes Old Morality and a number of men answered it in person.

"They have beaten us at last, senior," said Old Morality, half-choked with his emotions, as he came and saw the dead woman lying on the earth, and other evidence of the despoiler's work.

"Yes, Morality, they have trapped us at last," replied Don Rossevan, "and we must retrieve our honor; we must rescue our friends, and deal a just punishment to the invaders of our home. Go, senior, and find who they are, and whither they have gone, and we will follow them to—"

"To the ends of the earth, which is eternity," exclaimed Colonel Miles.

The old ranger and scout moved away in search of the enemy's trail; and while he was gone, the friends and servants of Rossevan brought in their wounded comrades and buried the dead. The horses and cattle exposed to the raging fire were also taken care of and conveyed to other pens and corrals.

Don Rossevan went through the building and found that the robbers had not plundered the house generally, but had hurried away with the women and such light valuables as came in their way. This was evidence that the robbers had not come for plunder, of which the Ruins of Rossevan were rich, but for the three beautiful and innocent women.

The wounds of the wounded were dressed, and a party of six men detailed to remain and attend them and look after the stock; while the rest of the little band were organized, armed and equipped for the pursuit of the foe.

Pending these arrangements, Old Morality returned.

"Well?" said Don Rossevan to the old scout.

"I had no trouble in finding their trail, senior, and I came in sight of them about two or three miles from here. They are pushing Nor-west, no doubt for the Double Mountains, or the retreats and fastnesses of the mountains of New Mexico. They have your calesa, and to it is driven your four white horses."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Rossevan; "it occurs to my mind, now, that Anita had just ordered the calesa out when I carried Edith to the house in a swoon. She and Christie were all ready for a drive; but what else, Morality?"

"I did not see the girls," the scout continued, "but they, of course, were in the calesa. The doors were closed and the curtains drawn. A Mexican drove the outfit, and the way he handled the lines convinced me he was an old hand at the business. But the worst of it is, the robbers are not alone. Not less than twenty Apache Indians are with them, and, altogether, they number forty or fifty."

"Great heavens! then there is no hope," exclaimed Colonel Miles.

"Yes there is, colonel," said Morality; "there must be hope."

"Oh, what hope is there for me," cried the colonel, in bitter anguish of heart, "with my children in the hands of those inhuman fiends, and my friends all surrounded on the open plain by murderous savages and regulators?"

"Cheer up, senior colonel," said Don Rossevan; "I have little here, save the memory of the past to care for, myself; and a determined and desperate effort must be made to rescue our friends. I shall take every man that I can spare from those unfortunate men lying wounded and put them upon the trail. But, senior, a word with you aside, if you please."

"With pleasure," replied the old man, following him to one side.

"Colonel, Rossevan said, with some little embarrassment, "I want to ask you one question regarding your adopted daughter, Edith; is she a married woman?"

Colonel Miles started, and gazing into the face of his interlocutor with an expression of surprise and pain, asked:

"Senior, why do you ask that question?"

"I was told she was."

"Alas, senior, it is too true, too true! She was a wife and a widow within the same hour, and that, too, when she was a child, senior, a child scarcely sixteen. The only woman I ever loved, senior, was the mother of Edith Clayton; but her husband—Edith's father—was a bad, soulless wretch. Money was his great desire, his love. There was no sacrifice he would not make for money, and it was with the belief of obtaining money that he forced Edith into a secret marriage with a man whom he believed immensely rich. But the villain deserted her the hour that the ceremony was performed, and sent a letter back to her father stating that he had only married Edith for revenge upon him for a fancied wrong alleged to have been committed in a certain transaction between them. He wrote Mr. Clayton to take care of his young child, and that he would come some day and take her away. The blow killed her mother, and her father died with remorse. Then I adopted Edith, pure, sweet girl that she was, with all the grace, the love and gentleness of her sainted mother. Of course Edith never loved her husband. Child that she was, she knew not what marriage

was; she only acted in obedience to her father's wish; but it has fostered her liberty and happiness, for ever and anon she has received a letter from the villain reminding her of her marriage vows, and threatening to return to her. But she hates the very thought of him. Ah! it was a God-send that sent him away the hour of their marriage, and a God-send that keeps him away."

"Where was he when she last heard from him?" asked Rossevan.

"At New Orleans, I believe; he was talking of going to Cuba. I don't think she will ever be cursed with his presence again."

"Ah! senior, you are mistaken; she is with her husband this minute."

"What? My Edith with that heartless villain? Rossevan, you trifle with my heart!"

"Nay, nay, senior, I speak the truth; Edith is with her husband, and that husband is Black Boniface."

"How do you know this, Rossevan?"

Don Rossevan narrated all that had transpired in the orange grove between him and Edith and Black Boniface.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the old man, clutching his brow, while his powerful frame shook with the intensity of his emotions, "this is more than I can stand, Don Rossevan, it will kill me!"

"Courage, senior, courage," replied the Spanish recluse, "all may yet be well."

"At this juncture Old Morality approached and said:

"Senior Rossevan, we are now ready to march."

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGE KNIGHT.

It was night under the soft southern sky and a full moon and a galaxy of bright stars flooded woodland and plain with a mellow radiance.

Not a breath of air was stirring, and scarcely a sound emanated from the pulseless bosom of the great green prairie stretching away northward of the South Concho river; but upon the summit of a bold eminence, crowned by mesquit and oak, the faint glow of a camp-fire could be seen for miles, and now and then the flash of a lance-point, in the hands of a sentinel pacing to and fro outside of the chaparral in the moonlight, caught the eye of a watcher in the valley below.

In the chaparral, or motte if you please, were encamped Black Boniface and the Apache chief, War-Ax, and their followers; or most of them, at least.

Three days had elapsed since the attack upon the Ruins of Rossevan and the capture of Anita and the daughters of Colonel Miles.

Rapidly had the outlaws been pushing northward with their fair captives and their booty, hoping to reach a place of safety ere the friends of the maidens could overtake them; and three days' journeying had been made without hearing or seeing anything whatever of pursuers. When they went into camp upon the night in question they were over one hundred and twenty miles from the Ruins. They had made forced marches, and but for the trouble they had met in crossing streams with the *cañes*, or carriages, in which it was found more expedient and comfortable, in one sense of the word, to carry the women, they would have been well on toward the great table-land of Northwestern Texas.

Darkness had long since settled over the camp of the regulators. Supper had been dispatched, and Anita, Christie and Edith had retired to their tent, between which and the carriage they were permitted a choice of lodgings. Contrary to their expectations they had been treated very kindly. Everything had been done to make them comfortable. When in their carriage they were seldom troubled by the presence of Black Boniface, and when in their tent they were provided with ample food, water and such requirements as the march would afford. They were also permitted to wander at pleasure anywhere within the closely-guarded lines of the encampment.

Anita and Christie had become somewhat indifferent to their situation and less defiant and resentful to their captors; but Edith was cast down and sad at heart and would have died with sheer despair but for the presence of her two companions. The latter, perhaps, did not fully comprehend the magnitude of their danger, although there was a terror in the presence of the bearded outlaws, the painted and plumed savages, and low-browed, evil-disposed Mexican half-breeds. As their captors had treated them kindly, the journey, to these two maidens, began to partake somewhat of a romantic adventure. At any rate they possessed a faculty of appearing happy whether they really were or not, and whether in camp or on the march they talked and sung in sweetest strains. And when they sung all others listened, for there was that in their sweet young voices that stirred their captors' hearts and filled their breasts with tender admiration; and men who had never known respect for a fellow-man were in their beads if at all, and otherwise yielded respect to the serene and lovely presence of woman.

At the time we introduce the reader to the outlaw camp, Black Boniface, Dr. Jules Rocheford and War-Ax were seated at one side, smoking and conversing in low tones.

"Another day's journey," Boniface said, in reply to a question, "will, in my opinion, place us beyond reach of any disposed to follow us. If we are attacked at all, it will be to-night or early to-morrow morning; but I feel assured that our scouts patrolling the valley will see that we are not taken by surprise. Moreover, every man must eat, sleep and walk with his arms at hand ready for a fight, for, I tell you what, that old Miles will fight like a demon for his kids."

"I think, monsieur, said Rocheford, blandly,

"that that little diversion at Sand Prairie will help us out."

"Yes, if the boys and Indians can only hold Miles's train there, if they cannot capture it altogether, it will keep their forces divided. Of course, there's nothing to fear of the strength that Don Rossevan can put in pursuit of us, if it is, as I have heard, that he cannot muster over a score of men; and some of these we struck off the list in the fight near the ruins the other day."

"But we must not forget that Old Morality will, in all human probability, lead them," said Rocheford, "and with the cunning of this man and the audacity of Little Texas, they might give us a peck of trouble."

"We give them lead and lance-point," said War-Ax.

"Yes, or carve them with broad-sword and battle-axe," replied Boniface; "but then I really don't apprehend the least bit of trouble, and I've not been in Texas these three years not to know about how the land lays in such matters."

"Captain," said a man running up to where the three men sat, "Red Joe wants to see you on the south side of the chaparral at once."

"Well, Red Joe's been on the scout to-night. I wonder what he wants," said Boniface, rising to his feet.

"I don't know; but he seems in a great hurry, excited."

Red Joe was a Mexican half-breed, a sly, cautious fellow, and Boniface's most trusted scout, whom the robber had sent out in company with two Apache warriors to patrol the valley south of them. He sat in his saddle when Boniface came out of the grove and asked:

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Somethin' wrong in the valley, captain. A horseman's been seen there—a dark horse and strange-looking rider."

"Furies! it must be some of the enemy's advance scouts!" replied the captain; "couldn't you ride him down?"

"We might possibly, but then we thought it best to report before attemptin' it. Ye know there might be others nigh ready for us. That strange horseman might be a bait to a spring-trap for a few of us."

"You're right there, Joe," responded Boniface; "I'll give you credit for sagacity and cool-headedness; but it would be well to find out, if you can, who that horseman is."

"I am satisfied, captain, it's some one reconnoiterin' our position, and I'd suggest the utmost silence—that not a gun or pistol be fired at the horseman even if a good shot be offered. If we give chase, my trusty saber'll answer all purposes in close quarters, while the lances and knives of the Apaches will do their work silently."

"All right, Joe; use your own judgment in the premises; bring the unknown in alive if possible—dead, if you must," replied Boniface.

Red Joe turned his horse and rode southward, passed the guards, and galloped down the hill and joined his Apache comrades in the valley.

The moon was shining brightly, though here and there the shadows of a bush or a huge cactus dotted the grassy plain, and it was by the flash of their lance-points in the moon-rays that Red Joe was enabled to distinguish his motionless Apache friends from the bushes, and riding up to them he said:

"Have you seen that horseman, Tall Pole?"

"Yes, see him there—then there—then there—all quick as one time," was Tall Pole's way of illustrating the ubiquity of the unknown horseman.

"Well, we've orders to look out for him," said the Mexican scout, "and run him down if possible, and take him dead or alive."

"Ugh, good!" ejaculated Tall Pole.

The three made their way slowly and cautiously up the valley, Red Joe with drawn saber and the Apaches with their spears ready to throw. They moved on as if expecting the strange horseman to emerge from every shadow or rise up out of the earth. They scrutinized each bush, and searched the tall grass with ferret eyes. They rode up the valley upon one side, then back upon the other. Then they searched the tall grass and the shadows right and left. It seemed as though they had ridden over every rod of ground where it was possible for an enemy to be concealed, but despite their close search, the looked-for horseman suddenly rose upon their right.

The savage who saw him first uttered a cry of alarm.

"Ride, men, ride!" exclaimed Red Joe, and putting spur he dashed away in pursuit of the unknown, the Indians following up.

Not a word was uttered as they thundered away. The unknown horse fled as if upon winged feet. It headed south across the valley, circled the point of a bluff and then began to ascend the sloping hill-side.

Although the first to start in the chase, it soon became evident that the Apaches would pass Red Joe, for their animals were fleet; but fleetest still was the horse of the strange unknown. The Mexican seeing he was losing ground, plied whip and spur more vigorously, but it was all to no purpose; the Apaches passed him, and soon a hundred yards separated them; but the Indians gained but a trifle if any upon the foe, and they had begun to despair of ever overtaking him, when suddenly and unexpectedly, the unknown came to a halt, and facing about, prepared to meet them in combat. A sword gleamed in his hands, and his whole body seemed to emit a shimmering, sparkling light.

The Apaches dug their heels into their ponies' sides, and poised their lances hurried themselves upon the stranger. The one in the lead aimed his

lance at the breast of the foe; but to his surprise the sharp steel glanced from his body with a ring as if from a metallic breast-plate, and as he sped on ahead the unknown, the latter struck him with the sword he held aloft, and the Apache rolled to the earth nearly beheaded. About this time the other warrior came up and hurled his lance with all his power against the foe, but to his surprise the keen point failed to pierce the unknown's breast. It glanced harmlessly off, though the blow well-nigh unseated the stranger.

After throwing the weapon, the Apache sped on, but seeing that he had failed in impaling the foe, he wheeled his horse and again charged upon him. Again they came together, but the lance of the Apache was shattered on the iron breast of the stranger, and the Indian, himself, fell under the sword of the terrible horseman.

Red Joe, by this time, had come up, and seeing the fate of his companions saw that he had an enemy worthy of his own steel, and drawing rein he turned to the right and began circling and maneuvering around the unknown. He had a fair view of him and saw that his head was covered with a queer-looking cap, that his face was masked, and that his body glowed and sparkled in the moon's rays like rippling water. But all this filled the Mexican with little concern, and with an oath he finally turned toward the enemy and charged upon him. As he came up the masked stranger braced himself in his saddle, and for several moments the clash of sword and saber rung upon the vibrant air.

Red Joe was a skilled swordsman in his way, and this he soon discovered his antagonist was not. By a dextrous pass of his saber he essayed to reach his enemy's heart, but the point of the weapon glanced off; and it was then that he discovered the stranger wore a coat of mail—was in full armor even to helmet and visor.

Who was he? from whence came this armored knight of the great Texas plain? These were the questions the Mexican scout asked himself, but he had to consider them in the heat of battle, for the strange knight was now pressing him sorely.

Right skillfully did the robber-scout parry the blows aimed at his head and heart, for since his failure to find the unknown's heart he had been placed upon the defensive. Suddenly he struck the point of his enemy's sword downward, inflicting a wound in his horse's neck which caused the animal to leap forward and carry his rider beyond reach of the armored foe; but quick as a flash, almost, the latter wheeled his horse and followed him up and struck the saber from the Mexican's hand, rendering him defenseless save in the speed of his horse; and this he put to good use—fleeing in the direction of Boniface's camp.

The mysterious victor did not follow up his victory, but with a low, triumphant laugh he drew rein, raised his visor and gazed around him. His breath came quick and hard. His face was flushed. His eyes finally became settled upon the dim light on the crest of the hill north of him. A deep, tremulous sigh escaped his lips and his form shook with emotion.

"They are there," he mused. "God, if I only dare!"

The thought uppermost in his mind seemed almost irresistible, and, as if in fear of its getting the better of his judgment, he pulled his horse violently around and turning his back upon the camp of Black Boniface rode away. As he galloped down the plain in his glittering armor the mind of a casual observer would, no doubt, have been carried back to the heroic days of chivalry—when the helmeted knight went forth to do battle for his country or fight for the Holy Cross on the plains of Palestine.

The mailed horseman rode on until the level plain broke into a succession of wooded hills and bluffs overlooking the valley through which flowed a small stream paying tribute to the South Concho, then he drew rein and listened. Hearing nothing he turned down a narrow defile and entering the shadows of the dense woods rode on until a voice commanded:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"A friend and scout," replied the horseman.

"Advance and give the countersign."

The armored knight advanced and gave the countersign and then rode on a few rods further when he came suddenly upon a score of armed men seated and reclining around the embers of a waning camp-fire. They were a band of Texan Rangers under one Captain Lore Reynolds.

The mailed scout dismounted and hitching his horse entered the crowd where he was hailed with no little surprise and eager joy.

"Well, my good knight," said Captain Reynolds, "did you find the camp of Don Rossevan?"

"No, but I struck a thing almost as good," replied the scout.

"Ah! indeed?"

"Yes, I found the camp of Black Boniface, and three of his scouts found me, when I proceeded to engage them in a tilt with sword and lance. To this armor I owe my life, but I'll swear I like to get the life jolted out of me a time or two, but I came out first best—in other words, I licked the robbers." The rangers clapped their hands and shouted with delight.

Then the mailed knight removed his helmet and visor, and the red, flushed face of our hero, Little Texas, the Boy Mustang, was revealed.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE FOOT-HILLS.

This reader will remember that we left Little Texas in a previous chapter on his way to the assistance of Colonel Miles's train that was surrounded by robbers and Indians on the Sand Ridge Prairie. In due course of time the gallant youth reached

his destination to find that Captain Lore Reynolds and his rangers had preceded him there more than an hour, and had already driven the Indians away and relieved the train. So there was nothing left for him to do but return to the ruins, and this he did at the head of the train and the Texan Rangers, arriving there during the night to find the place almost deserted, and to learn the terrible and distressing news of Boniface's attack upon the Ruins and the capture of the three women, Anita, Christie and Edith.

The youth was bowed down with grief, but he soon rallied. There was work for him to do, and as the Texan Rangers were in pursuit of Black Boniface he accompanied them when they continued their march northward from the Ruins.

The Ruins de Rossevan had been left in care of old Senor Alphonso Gomez, an aged retainer of the house of Rossevan, and the devoted and inseparable friend of Don Juan, whom he had followed across the sea to his secluded home. He had been the companion of Juan's father, and had fought with him when a mere youth in the wars of Spain. He had been a great military man, and possessed a wonderful love for the brave and beautiful. As a natural consequence he had taken a great liking to our hero, Little Texas, and when the Young Mustanger came marching into the place at the head of the emigrants and rangers, his joy knew no bounds. In his great admiration for the boy, he was inclined to give him more credit and honor than he merited or claimed; and before his departure with the rangers he took the youth into his private room and unlocking a heavy chest that bore the marks of time, he took therefrom a beautiful knightly armor and said:

"My boy, you are a brave and noble lad, worthy of the emulations of the pen of the inspired historian, and it is my desire to bestow upon you a precious gift—this armor, which was worn centuries ago by the young Prince of Gonzomas. It is just your size. I wore it when I was a boy, and fought with it on by the side of Juan's father. It has been handed down from generation to generation, an heirloom in the illustrious family of Gomez, I being the last of the family, the last to receive it. It must soon fall to strangers—a new heritage, and I can think of no one that I would rather bestow it upon than upon you, Little Texas; for you, I know, will not disgrace it. Moreover, my boy, it has been a charm to him who possessed it and wore it upon the tented field. Put it on, my son, and may the blessings and mercy of a kind Providence prosper and protect you."

Little Texas's boyish curiosity and admiration were excited by the sight of the glittering armor, and he could not resist the temptation to put it on. It fitted him neatly, and though it was rather heavy and cumbersome, the youth's heart swelled with pride, and he accepted the gift with many kind thanks. He was too much of a boy not to wear it, and so he rode forth clad in the armor worn by Spanish knights of old. He soon became accustomed to it, and at noons and nights, when halting for dinner or for the night, Captain Reynolds took great delight in drilling him in the sword exercise, for he was an apt scholar. What little he had learned we have seen put to good use with the two Apaches and Red Joe, all three of whom he had vanquished, and then rode back to the rangers' camp among the hills.

The lad had gone out in hopes of finding Don Rossevan's party, for, although they had not followed the trail of those pursuers, but had "cut across lots," they felt certain they would overtake their friends near the point where they had encamped; but when the Boy Mustanger reported the proximity of Black Boniface's camp, the whereabouts of Rossevan and Miles became a question of no little importance.

"Surely," said Captain Reynolds, "they have not been driven back by Boniface's minions; and yet it is singular that they should be behind us since they had a day's start of us."

"I'm of the opinion, captain," replied our hero, "that they're off on our right if they haven't been driven back. To-morrow will be very likely to reveal the situation of all parties concerned; though I'll be blest if I wouldn't like to bounce Boniface's camp to-night."

"Did you ascertain his strength?" asked Reynolds.

"I couldn't, captain; they had a double line of pickets, and scouts outside of these so thick that I couldn't get near the camp."

"Then we had better not attempt to do anything to-night, for, if we do strike and fail, all will be up. We must make sure, before we leap, where we are to land. Daylight will enable us to find out their strength, and then if it is deemed expedient we will make the attack, whether we meet Rossevan's party or not."

Thus the matter was settled, and in a few minutes the rangers were stretched along the earth with their saddles for pillows and a blanket over them, sound asleep. Their horses were tied to saplings hard by. They slept on their arms. Guards, with practiced eye and ear, paced their lonely beat.

And thus the night wore away, and as the red dawn began to blaze up against the sky the rangers arose from a refreshing slumber. They were supplied with rations from which they made their matutinal meal. Then their horses, which had been picketed to grass an hour before, were brought in, bridled and saddled, and at a signal every man leaped into his saddle.

The Boy Mustanger donned his armor and took his place at the head of the column with Captain Reynolds, when the order to march was given.

As the little party filed up the narrow, wooded valley and debouched into the open prairie, the report of a rifle came rolling down the morning, with startling intonations. It was immediately followed in rapid succession by a dozen other reports that were mingled with fierce, savage yells.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the captain, "there's a fight going on!"

"Captain," replied Little Texas, with a sudden start, "that firing is just off to our right, and I'll venture the assertion that our friends under Don Rossevan have been attacked there by Boniface's hounds!"

"I heartily agree with you there, boy," said the captain, then turning his head, he exclaimed: "Right wheel, and forward at the double-quick!"

Away went the rangers at a sweeping gallop. Little Texas still kept his place in the lead, and as the sound of battle came nearer, the lad seemed attracted by some dreadful fascination, and he spurred on as if eager for the conflict.

They soon arrived in the vicinity of the battle, though they could see no enemies; but from the cover of the wooded bluffs that swept around from the South, they could see the smoke of battle rising on the still air. By it were the rangers enabled to tell the location of the two lines, but which was enemies and which friends they could not determine, and so the Boy Mustanger was sent forward to reconnoiter.

When the lad returned the sun was just rising. He brought the information that a party of Indians and regulators were posted on a densely wooded ridge, and were directing a vigorous attack upon some one, he could not tell whom, in the valley below.

"At any rate," the boy concluded, "it will be safe for us to attack the Indians, and that at once. We may relieve our friends by it, and, if not, we'll relieve somebody else's friends."

Without further delay the rangers entered the woods, and then, at a signal, charged down upon the foe with a battle-cry that had struck terror into the heart of many an Indian and robber. The enemy, taken by surprise, fled at their approach, and mounting their ponies, hunched just over the brow of the hill, escaped into the prairie.

The rangers would have given pursuit, but at this juncture their attention was attracted by a deafening cheer coming up from the valley on the right, and then a score or more of horsemen galloped up the hill toward them. At their head rode Old Morality, Don Rossevan and Colonel Miles.

"It's them! it's them!" shouted Little Texas, and waving his sword above his head he uttered a shout that was repeated by the rangers and the morning echoes.

Colonel Miles was delighted to meet our hero, and his joy knew no bounds when he learned from Texas's lips that his train had been rescued by Captain Reynolds, and was then safe at the Ruins of Rossevan.

But a few moments' delay were made when the rangers and settlers, with a force now equal to that of Black Boniface, pressed forward upon the trail of the enemy. They soon reached the grove wherein Little Texas had found the foe in camp the night before. Far over the level plain they could just see the dim outlines of the fleeing foe—miles away.

"Forward, men, forward!" commanded Captain Reynolds, and then the pursuers galloped on at a lively speed across the prairie.

Little Texas, still clad in his knightly armor, rode with Rossevan, Miles and Morality. To him the old soldiers and the Spanish Prince looked for guidance in the pursuit. He knew the country better than any of them, and in reply to a question in relation to the prospect of overhauling the foe, he said:

"It's doubtful whether we overtake them before they reach the foot-hills of the Double Mountains, and yet we had ought to catch them if possible, for if they do get into the mountains we may have trouble."

"Our strength must be equal to theirs, Texas," said Rossevan.

"Yes, but mind you, we're going away from our friends while they're going into their own stronghold and where their strength will increase right along, say nothing about the advantage of acting on the defensive."

"If they beat us into the hills, we'll have to rely on stratagem," said Captain Reynolds, "to overcome them; when I find I can't win one way, I have recourse to another, and I have never known what it is to fail; neither has the Boy Mustanger."

"Of course there can be no doubt but that the enemy has been apprised of our being in hot pursuit, and they will be all the more vigilant and exert every effort to elude us," said Don Rossevan.

"Yes, but gold-dash their eyes of 'em, we'll follow them into the polar sea, or a warmer region, but what we get them gals," said Old Morality; "we must get them."

"We will rescue them, Morality," said Little Texas, "cost what it will."

The pursuers passed on, their eyes constantly upon the moving column before them, and as the hours wore away and weary miles were traversed they seemed to gain but little upon the foe. In view of this fact, they did not halt for noon, and as the sun sunk slowly westward the dark woods skirting the foot-hills of the Double Mountains came in sight, causing the hearts of Colonel Miles and Don Rossevan to sink within their breasts. It seemed utterly impossible for them to overtake the enemy before the mountain was reached.

Reynolds and Little Texas cheered them up with the assurance that they were gaining upon the regulators faster than it seemed. And such was really the case, for when the sun was still two hours high they were not over two miles behind Boniface, while the mountain was still miles away; but the fact that they could not overtake the foe before he reached the foot-hills could no longer be concealed from the sorrowing friends of the captives.

After some discussion as to their future plans, it

was arranged that Little Texas and Old Morality endeavor to reach the timber, by a circuitous route, in advance of the foe. This seemed possible since both were mounted upon swift horses, and in case they were successful, they could ascertain the exact strength of the foe, and perhaps get an idea of the course they would pursue through the hills.

With the best wishes of all, the old man and the boy set off on their journey. The latter, in order to lighten the load of his horse, had left his armor in care of a young Mexican. He felt that he would have no particular need of it for a while.

The two kept in the valleys out of sight of the regulators, and as the way was smooth and unobstructed, they put their horses to their utmost speed, and a little before sunset they reached the little creek at the southern extremity of the woods. Crossing the stream they gained the cover of the forest a few minutes before the cavalcade of Black Boniface came in sight, not over a quarter of a mile away.

"Gold-dash if we weren't in the holy nick of time!" exclaimed the old ranger, gleefully; "but then you allers have a way of bein' jist in time to a dot—like the farmer or gard'ner in the Sunday-school book that's *chawy* nigh to rescue the good little boy from the brook. Oh, I'll never forget that bull-fight, and the way you inserted yourself in between me and that frolicsome old bull, and saved my life. I do hope you can sandwich yerself in between ole Bonny and them gals jist as nice."

"I'll do my best, Morality; I want to rescue them gals jist to hear Colonel Miles go on."

"The colonel does love his gals, don't he?—both of 'em, while I think you only love the one. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Fiddlesticks, Morality. I love them all."

"Yes, yes; I understand you, my lark; but then I don't blame you for likin' and lovin' that daisy of a little Christie, for there's more sunshine and sweetness in her soul than forty angels. If I just had the time, gold-blest if I wouldn't primprim myself up and cut you out of that gal; but say, what's become of our robber-folks, Tex?"

"They've reached the creek a quarter of a mile below," said the boy, whose eyes had never for a moment lost sight of the enemy, "and are crossin' this blessed minute. We'd better edge down that way and see where they go. I'm of the opinion they'll give the calesa up soon, owing to the difficulty of journeying through the wooded hills with it."

By this time it was sunset on the prairie and twilight in the woods, and our two friends were enabled to get within forty yards of the enemy unobserved. The last of the train had just crossed the creek and the carriage and some thirty men moved on, while a party of about twenty more remained at the creek—ostensibly for the purpose of disputing the passage of the pursuers.

"That'll never do," observed Old Morality; "you can see what the hounds are up to, and I'll beat that little game, I will, by heavens! I'll circle back and meet the boys as they come in and drop a bug in their ears."

"And I'll follow the carriage and escort," said the Boy Mustanger; "they'll not go much further to-night unless they give up the carriage, and if they do stop and you can get our folks in between them ambushed villains and camp perhaps we will surprise ole Bonny to-night. I'll tell you, Morality, you hustle around and bring the boys to where we left our horses—and wait there till I come. I'll be there by midnight, if I come at all, and nothing but death'll keep me away."

"All right, boy, do be keeful," cautioned Old Morality, and the two parted—Morality going back to where he had left his horse, while Little Texas, on foot, took the trail of the calesa.

As the shadows were deepening in the dense timber Boniface was compelled to move slowly, and so the Young Mustanger soon came in sight of the robber.

The way lay across a level bottom, but this suddenly broke into a chain of steep hills and narrow valleys. The hills were bald and barren, the valleys rough and densely wooded. Into one of these defiles Boniface led his cavalcade; and Little Texas, hurrying forward, passed up along the hillside and, by a wide detour, descended into the valley in advance of the enemy. By this time darkness concealed all from view, but Texas could hear the sound of the horses' feet and the rattle of the wheels of the calesa approaching.

Satisfied that the regulators must soon stop for the night, the boy climbed into a tree and creeping along a large limb concealed himself among the dense foliage. Here he awaited the approach of Boniface, and he had scarcely become settled in his position when he felt the limb, upon which he was seated, swaying, and heard a slight, scratching sound thrilling along its length. He started and gazed along the bough, and through the Egyptian gloom of the place he beheld a pair of dull, glowing orbs. A shiver passed over the youth's form for well he knew those balls of fire were the eyes of a panther. The animal had crept toward him and now lay crouched upon the limb ready to spring upon him at the slightest movement. He could hear the tail of the beast lashing the limb. He fixed his eyes upon those burning orbs. The sound of Black Boniface's voice giving command, and the curses of the driver of the calesa could be heard near. The outlaws would pass directly under him and their approach would no doubt precipitate the panther upon him. His situation was, indeed, precarious; but he prepared himself for the worst.

A dozen Apache warriors, the advance guard, soon passed under him, their plumed heads brushing the foliage at his feet. Then came Black Boniface and several of his men, and close behind them the noisy calesa. Still Little Texas kept his eyes upon

those of the panther, and as the light of the vehicle came dragging along under the low-hanging foliage, he saw those burning eyes move, then spring toward him, accompanied by a fearful scream.

With drawn knife the boy met the panther, and drove the blade into his neck. With another horrible scream the beast broke its hold and fell to the earth, striking the edge of the calesa as it went down.

The vehicle stopped. The horses reared and snorted with alarm. A wild confusion ensued. The panther, recovering itself, sprang upon an outlaw. A fearful scream burst from the man's lips as the talons and fangs of the maddened beast tore into his quivering flesh.

A dozen men dismounted and rushed to their friend's rescue. Cries and yells rent the night. Horses reared and plunged with affright, some breaking away and flying up the valley; and but for the assistance of others the driver of the calesa could never have managed his team.

But the conflict soon ended and order was restored. The panther lay dead and an outlaw dying. The youth in the tree was unharmed. He sat on the limb, his feet resting on the carriage top.

In a few moments more the march was resumed, and when the calesa rolled on, the daring Boy Mustang was a passenger, lying at full length upon the top, his head within two feet of the driver.

The youth had resolved upon a desperate expedient.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VIALS OF A VILLAIN'S WRATH.

On through the dark defile crept the cavalcade. The shadows were deep, for overhead was spread an unbroken canopy of low-hanging foliage through which neither star nor moon was visible.

In the calesa sat the captive girls, their hearts filled with shadows as dark and foreboding as the shadows of night around them. They had grown despondent as the day advancing brought no one to their rescue; but on the contrary brought them nearer the Double Mountains where escape from the power of Boniface would be impossible.

They shuddered as they rode along through the dark woods listening to the oaths of the driver. They could hear the drooping foliage dragging across the side and along the top of the vehicle, the doors of which were locked; and a knowledge of their being shut up in a prison liable to be dashed to pieces at any moment did not add to their mutual comfort.

After creeping along a mile or so a voice suddenly commanded:

"Turn in there, Jehu, under that tree, and we will stop till morning."

"Oh, thank the good Virgin!" cried the fair Anita; "did you hear what the man said? Now we will get to rest."

The calesa was driven under some low-hanging foliage, where it was half-hidden from view, and the horses unhitched.

A dozen guards were stationed around the camp and a fire lighted a few rods in front of the vehicle.

Then Black Boniface came with a lantern and, unlocking the door of the wheeled prison, said:

"Ladies, we have halted for the night, and, as you must be tired of your long confinement, perhaps you would like to walk out. If so, I assure you that you have the liberty of the camp to come and go at will."

"Thank you, senor," replied the Spanish maid, "we will be pleased to avail ourselves of your kindness."

The regulator hung his lantern on a limb near the door of the calesa and turned and walked away.

"Oh, my sweet little sister!" cried Edith, pushing back Christie's disheveled locks and kissing her fair brow, "I see this suffering is beginning to wear upon your young heart."

"I am trying to be brave, Edith," replied the maiden, "and bear my burden with—What, Anita?"

This abrupt question was caused by Anita, who, grasping her arm, raised her finger to impose silence.

"Hark!" whispered Anita.

The three listened, and, besides the murmur of the voices outside, they heard a slight tapping upon the leather top of the carriage. They had heard it before, but thought nothing in particular of it, until it had grown louder; and now that they had fixed their attention upon it, seemed fraught with a strange significance.

The girls continued to listen in silence for several moments. Finally the tapping ceased, and was immediately followed by a different noise—a noise like that produced by the point of a keen knife, cutting through paper or silk. It seemed to be overhead, and glancing upward the maidens saw, in the dim glow of the lantern, something burst through the silk lining of the calesa. It was a slender, pointed object that glowed and sparkled in the light like a tiny stalactite. It was the point of a knife.

Quickly the captives exchanged glances, while their hearts, half in doubt and half in fear, rose in their breasts. Their tongues became paralyzed, and Edith was upon the eve of leaping from the carriage in affright, when she saw the knife-point withdrawn, and heard a voice, distinct enough, whisper:

"Hist, girls, hist! a friend's near you." This is what the voice seemed to say, and yet each one looked as though she were in doubt as to what she had heard, and not until they had exchanged views upon the subject, and found that each one had heard the same words, did they become convinced that some one was upon the carriage, or in the tree directly overhead.

Seeing there were no robber eyes turned toward them, Anita again looked up, and again she saw the

knife blade protruding through the top of the carriage, and moving along with a tearing sound, and cutting its way through leather top and silken lining. When it was withdrawn, a slit over six inches long had been made, and fingers were seen to pull the edges apart, and then a face, but partly seen, became visible at the opening.

"For the Lord's sake, girls," they heard the unknown whisper, in a quick, excited tone, "don't let on; keep still, now—I am little Texas."

It was well the Young Mustang gave words of precaution before he gave his name, for even then the captives could scarcely restrain their emotions. Christie's eyes glowed with joy and excitement, and biting her lip to keep back the emotions struggling for utterance, she clasped her hands over her breast and started to her feet, her eyes fixed on those looking down upon her. But recovering her self-control, she sank back into her seat by Anita's side.

"Christie," whispered the daring boy, "come nearer."

Christie pulled the door of the calesa shut, then, rising held her ear near the youth's lips.

"Be awful careful, Christie," the boy whispered; "we're all in a bad pickle, but the robbers don't know I am here. You gals must get out and take your walk. Never let on but you're feelin' awful bad. I don't know that I can help you any, the position I'm in. The droopin' foliage covers me, now, but before the carriage leaves here I've got to climb into the branches above, and I'd like to have you folks climb up with me. There's several big limbs so close that I can reach them lying here; but keep still and wait. Colonel Miles, Don Rossevan and some forty citizens and Texan Rangers are not far away, and no tellin' what moment they'll come plungin' down on old Boniface. But say, Christie, do you folks sleep in the calesa?"

"Black Boniface," she replied, "always has given us our choice of the carriage or a tent, and we always take the tent because we can lie down. Here we have to sit up all the time."

"Well, you must take the calesa to-night, and if I can I'll help you. I'll be nigh you, anyhow, and that's a great pleasure. Now go and take your walk and then come back here. Have them bring your supper here, too, and then—"

"Then you shall have some," interrupted Christie, her eyes sparkling.

Thus the conversation ended, and putting on their hats and wraps, the girls alighted from the carriage and sauntered listlessly about the camp, though their thoughts were ever upon the lad lying upon the top of the vehicle, for they were in a constant fear and suspense lest he be discovered, notwithstanding the fact that they had seen, by a casual glance, that he was well screened by the dense foliage.

Meanwhile, the robbers and Apaches were busy. A huge bonfire had been built in the entrance to the valley, and another one some distance above camp. This was done to guard against every contingency of danger from up or down the valley, while, on the barren ridges on either side of the valley, a double guard was stationed, with the moonlight to aid them.

Supper was cooked by the fire lighted a few rods in front of the calesa for the men; but for the ladies, supplies had been brought from the pantry of Don Rossevan.

The women spent half an hour or more walking about the place, and then as they were returning to the calesa, Boniface advanced and said:

"Ladies, will you occupy the carriage or the tent to-night?"

"The calesa, if you have no objection, senor," replied Anita.

"None at all, ladies; act your pleasure," the villain replied.

The women entered the vehicle feeling much refreshed and invigorated by their exercise. The lantern still hung upon the limb where its red beams flooded the interior of their apartment.

Supper was finally brought to the captives. It consisted of bread, meats, fruits and wine, all of which had been taken from Anita's home. And no sooner was the servant's back turned than Christie began to pass the lion's share of her supper to the brave boy lying on the top of the heavy Spanish calesa.

"I've heard about the ravens feedin' Elijah in the wilderness," the lad whispered, "but this is three angels feedin' a boy mustanger."

"Why, Texas, how can you joke when you're in such danger?" asked Christie, a faint smile lighting up her pretty countenance.

"I'm not jokin', Miss Christie," he replied, "I'm the most serious boy in Texas, particularly when I'm in such danger."

"And when you are where I am, you are always in danger," replied Christie; "I shall never forget our ride and the night at your cabin."

When the quartette had finished their supper, the servant removed the remnants, and then Black Boniface came and leaning upon one of the wheels talked to the women some time. He stood between the lantern and the door of the calesa so that his own shadow concealed the flushed, burning faces of the girls. They were so afraid he would discover the rent in the lining of the calesa overhead that they scarcely knew what they said and did, and when he bid them good-night, closed the door of the vehicle, and locked it and went away, he flattered himself that the captives were becoming reconciled to their situation and really beginning to enjoy their journey, as did the heroine of Lalla Rookh her journey into the delightful valley of Cashmere.

Black Boniface did not reproach Edith with the past—of being his wife. His lips seemed sealed in regard to this, and he addressed her with the same attention he did the other two. But as they had

been upon a constant move ever since their capture, perhaps his silence was only owing to the want of an opportunity to speak of the past.

The regulator took his lantern away, leaving the women in blinding darkness; but this did not trouble them. In fact, they were glad of it, for it gave them an opportunity to converse with Little Texas; and for the next hour the three plied the lad with questions concerning their friends.

In the meantime, most of the robbers had laid down to sleep with their arms at their sides. The horses belonging to the calesa had been brought in from pasture and kept in harness ready to move at a moment's notice. The party left at the creek to watch the pursuers had not come in yet, and as long as they were absent, Black Boniface knew they stood between him and danger, and so he gave himself no uneasiness about the pursuers.

The night seemed to drag wearily by upon leaden feet. To the women it seemed as if daylight would never come. Not one of them closed an eye in slumber, neither did the brave boy lying upon the calesa. All were waiting for—they knew not what. There was little to encourage them in the hope of escape. The Boy Mustang seemed powerless to aid them in any way. If he could only have got away from there, he could have brought assistance in a little while, for he felt assured that Old Morality, with the rangers and citizens, was waiting for him back at the creek where he had left his horse. But he was helpless, powerless.

Thus the hours wore on until morning was not far away. Streaks of red, heralding the coming of day, were beginning to shoot athwart the eastern sky. The Indians and regulators were astir—some preparing their morning meal, some saddling up the horses, and others packing up their traps and bundles, when suddenly a scout came charging into camp with the startling intelligence that the Texan Rangers had flanked their friends left at the creek, and were then marching upon camp.

Had a bomb-shell exploded in their midst it would not have caused a greater consternation; but in a very few minutes every regulator and red-skin was ready to march. The horses were harnessed to the calesa, and, when ready to start, Boniface went to the vehicle with his lantern, opened the door, and looking at the captives, said:

"Ladies, I hope you had a good rest; we will start at once."

"Very well, senor," replied the fair Anita, with sarcastic innocence.

Boniface closed the door and again locked it. Then giving the lantern to one of his guides, he said:

"Take that, Pressley, and then lead the way where the driver can follow. Daylight will soon relieve you."

The guide turned and moved away, and the robber-chief, leaping into his saddle, shouted:

"Ready! march!"

The advance guard started off after the guide, the calesa rolled away, and the escort wheeled into line alongside the vehicle—the cavalcade was in motion. Its course lay northward up the valley.

Boniface had journeyed but a short way when the sound of fire-arms suddenly broke forth upon the clear morning air. It came from behind and told the regulator that the men he had left at the creek to watch the pursuers were at last engaged with the enemy.

Doubtful of what the result might be, Boniface grew uneasy and hurried forward the calesa. This he could do now with impunity, for the trees were not so thick, and the lantern carried by the guide enabled the driver to keep clear of those that did obstruct the way; and ere the sun rose they were miles from the place where they had passed the night.

Up to this time nothing had been heard from the battle-field, and still in doubt as to the result of the conflict, Black Boniface grew more restless and impatient than ever, and kept urging the calesa forward until at length the way became so broken and obstructed that it was impossible to proceed further with the vehicle. But Boniface was not long in supplying a contingency. He ordered three of the horses taken from the calesa, unharnessed and saddled with men's saddles. Upon these he proposed to mount the captives and move on. He advanced to the calesa, unlocked the door and jerked it open. As he did so he started back with a horrible oath, while his face became contorted with rage, and his eyes blazed with the frenzy of a madman. *There was but one of the three captives in the calesa, and that one was Christie Miles!*

"Hell and the furies!" burst from the villain's lips, "what does this mean? Where are those girls? Driver, speak out; is this the work of treachery?"

"Captain Boniface," said the driver, in dumb surprise, "as true as there is a sun I know nothin' of the captives. I supposed all along they were in the calesa."

"Curses on your blind stupidity! Did you not see that the top of the carriage was cut away?"

"I did not, captain, I'll swear I did not. I haven't looked back since we started. I saw you look into the calesa a moment before we started, and supposed all was right."

"And so it was, then!" raved the regulator.

"You know," continued the excited Jehu, "that dar'n't move my eyes off the horses comin' up the valley, and half the time then I had to keep dodgin' and jukin' to get along at all."

"Well, by heavens!" howled the infuriated Boniface, "there's a traitor in this party, and he has released them women. I will shoot the dog the moment I find out who he is!"

He drew his revolver and brandished it threateningly above his head—all the demon of the man's nature cropping out upon his anger-knotted face.

Christie regarded him for a moment and believing he was going to shoot some one on suspicion she said:

"Sir, you need accuse none of your men of releasing Anita and Edith."

"Then you pretend to know who released them?" he raved.

"Why should I not, when I have been here all the time? Had you not started just when you did this morning I would not be here either. Little Texas released the girls."

"Little Texas?" repeated the outlaw, wild with fury.

"Yes, Little Texas," answered Christie, calmly; "I tell you this to save you the trouble of killing any of your men on suspicion."

"It will be the death of more than one man, for I will recapture them girls if I have to wade through the fires of perdition," replied the regulator; then turning to his men he continued: "About face, men, and ride like demons to the south. Them girls must be recaptured!"

Obedient to the command of their leader the regulators and Apaches turned their faces down the valley and rode away at a wild, breakneck pace.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VALLEY.

LITTLE TEXAS deeply regretted his failure in carrying out the plan he had matured for the release of the three captives. The departure was made so quick that he was unable to relieve but two, and Christie was carried away. The moment he heard Black Boniface inform the girls that they would depart at once, the youth drew his knife, and with as little noise as possible, cut away the heavy leather top between the two rear bows of the carriage, making a hole large enough for the passage of the slender forms of the captives. Then Edith stepped upon the hind seat, bringing her head and shoulders through the opening in the top, and with the assistance of our hero was lifted from her prison and seated upon a large bough that had been previously selected by the boy for the purpose.

Scarcely a sound had been created, so silently did they work, and so perfect were the most minute details of the Young Mustanger's plan. Then the general confusion around them, and the darkness, had much to do with his success in executing his work so far, but no sooner had Edith been seated than the driver began climbing into his seat, rocking the calesa upon its creaky springs. Taking advantage of this moment, the boy lifted Anita from the carriage and placed her upon the limb at Edith's side; but before he could rescue Christie the driver spoke to his horses, the vehicle rolled away from under the tree, the pendent foliage swung back to its place, and no human eye could ever have penetrated the spot where our three young people sat concealed.

The regulators and savages soon filed away beyond the light of their camp-fires and into the twilight shadows beyond, never once suspecting the truth of the situation. In fact, the adventure of Little Texas was so bold and apparently impossible that the most careful and analytical mind would never have classed such a feat among the possible ones. In the first place, Boniface regarded it utterly impossible for an enemy to pass inside of their lines that night, guarded as they were by bonfires, moonlight and men, and in the next place he felt assured the guard left at the creek would check all advances of the pursuers.

"Bitter, indeed, was the disappointment of the Boy Mustanger and the two maidens when they heard the calesa roll away with brave Little Christie, and bitterer still must have been the regret and disappointment of Christie herself.

It was several moments before any one ventured to speak; but when assured the enemy had all left, Little Texas said:

"Girls, we three have escaped, I do believe."

"Oh! if poor Christie was only with us!" Edith lamented.

"The villains were a little too quick for me, or she'd have got out, too," said Texas; "but Christie must be rescued. You must first be in a safer place than this, for no tellin' what moment the robbers may find you missin', and come troopin' back in search of you. There! some one is comin' this way now!"

The shouts of men and the blare of a bugle suddenly awoke the morning echoes.

"Glory!" burst from the lips of Little Texas; "we are safe! we are safe! The rangers are comin', girls!"

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Edith.

The next moment a dozen horsemen, leaning forward in their saddles in order to pass the low boughs, glided under them. They were going up the valley. They were outlaws and Indians fleeing before Captain Lore Reynolds and Old Morality and their followers.

"Ho, there, gallant troopers!" shouted the Boy Mustanger, at the top of his lungs.

A dozen men drew rein under the tree. Among them were Don Rossevan and Colonel Miles.

"Who's up here?" demanded the colonel, parting the foliage overhead with his sword, and peering up among the branches.

"We're here, uncle: Anita, Little Texas and I," responded the fair Edith.

"Bless the good Lord! It is my Edith!" shouted the colonel.

"Yes, and Little Texas rescued us."

"God bless that boy!" the colonel shouted. "But, Christie—where is she?"

"The regulators got away with her, sorry to say," the Boy Mustanger answered; "I done my best, colonel, to save her, too, but I failed."

"Brave and fearless boy. He has done nobly," said Rossevan.

"Yes, he has," affirmed Colonel Miles; "come down here, children, and let me embrace you."

"Hullo!" suddenly exclaimed a familiar voice, "what've you got there? A possum or a ring-tailed robber?"

"Neither, Morality, but Little Texas and two of the girls."

Old Morality uttered a shout of joy, and riding under the tree looked up into the Boy Mustanger's face and exclaimed:

"Oh, you little imp of glorification! Didn't I tell you I wanted to rescue them gals myself? You scamp, I see now why you sent me off after the boys, while you hooked it off up here. God bless you, gals and boys, I am delighted to see you, but bless if I ar'n't in the dark as to how you escaped from that pack of human hounds."

"That was easy enough," said Little Texas, swinging himself to the ground, and then narrating his night's adventure with the panther and upon the top of the calesa.

When he had concluded, Don Rossevan called attention to their delay in the pursuit of the robbers.

"Yes, yes," said Old Morality, "we must not tarry longer. Christie must be rescued, poor child."

"Shall we send Anita and Edith back to the Ruins with an escort, or—"

"No; it will never do, senior, to weaken our force," interrupted Old Morality; "we've not a man to spare."

"Uncle," said Edith Clayton, "we can accompany you. I would rather do so than return to the Ruins without you."

"And so would I," added Anita, and the question was settled.

The rangers having brought Little Texas's horse from the creek the lad was soon in the saddle. A couple of led horses taken from the enemy were caparisoned for the maidens, and by the time the sun was an hour high, the pursuers were again in motion.

The Texan Rangers took the lead, with Captain Reynolds, Little Texas and Old Morality at their head, while Don Rossevan, Colonel Miles and a few others with Edith and Anita brought up the rear. Rossevan had dispatched two of his best scouts to feel the way in advance, and the party had not gone far when one of them came back with the news that a band of horsemen, outlaws and Indians, was approaching from the north at a rapid speed.

In a few moments Captain Reynolds formed his rangers in line of battle, the settlers and followers of Don Rossevan forming behind them, and in this order they awaited the foe. The clatter of hoofs soon burst upon their ears, then from the woods nearly the whole of Black Boniface's band swept into view. The outlaws were on their way back to search for the missing girls, and not until they were upon them did they know their pursuers were near.

Dr. Jue's Rocheford was at the head of the band and when he saw the rangers drawn up before him he ordered a halt. His first impulse was to turn and flee, but seeing his force was as large as that of his enemy, if not larger, he gave the order to charge.

With a yell the regulators and Apaches charged upon our friends, but they were met with a cool and deliberate fire that emptied a number of saddles and threw the band into some confusion; but Dr. Rocheford was as brave and fearless as he was wicked, and, in tones that seemed to come from brazen lungs, he rallied his men and again led them to the onslaught. But again the rangers poured a withering volley into their ranks and then advanced and met them in a hand-to-hand encounter. Sabres and lances, pistols and rifles clashed and rung together. Yells and groans, shouts and oaths burst above the horrible din of battle. Combatants in the saddle seemed imbued with the spirit of devils; the wounded upon the earth writhed and twisted under the grinding hoofs of the frenzied steeds, begging and crying for mercy.

CHAPTER XX.

A WRETCH'S END.

For awhile the result of the conflict seemed to hang upon an even balance; then it turned in favor of the regulators, then in favor of the rangers, so that no one could have told how it would end.

From their covert under the shadows of a clump of trees, Edith and Anita watched the sanguinary struggle, while Don Rossevan and Colonel Miles having ridden aside from them, sat upon their horses with revolvers in hand, pouring in a deadly fire upon the enemy whenever an opportunity was offered.

In the thickest of the fray was Dr. Rocheford, his head seeming to be encircled by a band of flashing steel, so skillfully did he handle his sword. His voice could easily be distinguished cheering on his men; but suddenly his voice became hushed, and Little Texas, who had singled out the villain and was making his way toward him, saw him ride out from among the combatants and spur his frantic charger toward the point where Anita and Edith were concealed. The Boy Mustanger followed him, for he saw what he was up to.

Not until the regulator was upon them did the maidens notice his approach. Both uttered a cry and turned their horses' heads to flee, but the Frenchman was already upon them, and riding alongside Anita, he leaned over in his stirrups and throwing his arms about her slender form, dragged her from her saddle; and then placing her in front of him, supported by one arm, he attempted to steal away. The villain believed that his movements were unobserved, so close was attention drawn to the battle; but he had gone but a little ways when he saw his implacable enemy, Little Texas, glide out

from among the combatants and follow him. Then began a lively race, but it was a short one. Rocheford, seeing he could not escape with his captive on horseback, dismounted, and, with the form of the half-taming girl in his arms, attempted to dodge his pursuer among the trees and shrubbery; but, quick as a flash, the Boy Mustanger was off his horse and gliding, like a ferret, in and out among the shadows upon the track of the regulator.

The boy gained rapidly on his foe, and by the time they had gone twenty rods, Rocheford saw that he must either give up the girl and flee, or stop and fight. The latter seemed the most agreeable to him, since he believed that the boy's friends were having all they could do, and that, alone and single-handed, he would have no trouble in crushing the life out of the troublesome youth. So stopping, he laid the now entirely unconscious form of Anita upon the ground and turned upon the pursuer. His pistols were empty, his sword he had dropped when he seized the maiden, and his knife was the only weapon he had left; but this, in his powerful fist, he felt was sufficient to crush the puny boy now so completely at his mercy.

Little Texas had drawn his sword—that trusty blade presented him by Don Rossevan. With a look of desperate determination the boy confronted Rocheford, eager enough for the fray that was in all human probability destined to decide the fate of Anita Rossevan.

"Come on, you accursed little stunted blood-hound!" exclaimed Rocheford, "and I'll carve you, soul and body into ribbons!"

"Coward!" fairly hissed the youth, as he stood within five feet of the burly Frenchman, "I do not fear you, and you know it. He who would leave the battlefield to steal an innocent little girl would strike the blow of a coward."

"Little fiend! say your prayers!" hissed the wretch, for!

"God protect the innocent," said the boy, humbly, then he leaped forward, and with a dexterous pass of his sword struck the knife from Rocheford's hand and sent it flying ten feet away, and then almost with the same motion, he made a forward thrust and drove the point of his keen blade into the villain's left breast.

Rocheford started back, his face growing black with baffled triumph, then white with fear. His lips parted with a snarl, his eyes blazed with a greenish hue. His face twitched with pain, and his body doubled over as if with a deadly cramp and sunk to the earth. As he went down he clasped his breast with one hand, while he raised the other—the palm outward—as if to ward off a blow, and in the imploring voice of a dying man he cried out:

"Mercy, boy, mercy!" Then he stretched himself at full length along the earth, rattled in the throat and became motionless. Blood trickled through the gash in his clothing, and spread over his breast.

"The poor wretch," said the boy hero, sadly, sorrowfully; "he's gone, and such a wicked, wicked soul. May the good Lord have mercy upon him."

Then the lad clipped off some leafy boughs with his sword and covered the body of the regulator that it might not meet the eyes of the maiden when she recovered from her swoon. This done, he turned to the girl and endeavored to bring her back to consciousness, but after working with her for a time he found his efforts were unavailing—that she was nearer dead than alive. Being unable to move her, and in doubts as to the result of the battle, the firing and fighting having ceased, the boy found himself in a dilemma. He was afraid to leave the girl until he could go for help, and yet something must be done. As if actuated by a sudden thought, he turned and ran back toward the valley.

On the way a groan arrested his attention, and stopping he looked into a clump of bushes where lay a wounded Mexican with a bullet-hole through his left shoulder. He was one of Don Rossevan's men who had crawled there from the battle-field.

"Ah, Little Texas!" he groaned, "the battle went ill with us."

"What! did the robbers whip?" questioned the Young Mustanger.

"Our friends were compelled to withdraw from the field—or they did withdraw, when in truth we were victorious, and some of the enemy already fleeing. Why it was, I know not."

"Perhaps the enemy received re-enforcements."

"I think not, Texas; but they followed our friends."

"Then the retreat of our friends must have been some of Old Morality's ideas to bag the enemy altogether."

"I hope so; but, Texas, I die of this wound."

"Let me see what I can do for you, Patro, though I have not much time to tarry. Don Rossevan's sister lies near us in a swoon."

"Go, then, senior, and save the fair young lady. I shall die anyhow."

"No, Patro, never! I cannot leave you without helping you; but first I will run to Anita and try and carry her, then bind up your wounds. Don't give up, Patro."

As he concluded he turned and ran back to where he had left the maiden, but to his surprise and horror he found she was gone, as was the body of Rocheford also. Upon examining the ground he found that he had been the victim of a foul deception—that he had been deceived by the villain Rocheford who was not only not dead, but so slightly wounded that he had been able to make off with the maiden. He had played his part with the consummate skill of a powerful actor, and our little friend could scarcely suppress a flood of tears when he realized how he had been deceived, and the danger that menaced the fair young Anita.

With eyes swimming in a mist, he searched the

ground for the villain's tracks. He had no trouble in finding them, and started off to follow the villain, when the promise he had made Patro suddenly occurred to his mind. Turning he ran with all his speed back to where he had left the Mexican, and found him dying. Drop by drop his life had ebbed away. The poor fellow was so near gone that he could not lift his hand nor speak. He tried to say something, but could not utter a syllable. He lifted his glassy eyes toward heaven and stared into vacancy as though he had a glimpse of the great beyond.

Little Texas's heart was touched with pity, and as the tears gathered in his eyes, he knelt by the dying man, and lifting his eyes toward heaven, murmured a prayer—a true, sincere and beautiful Christian prayer; and as the last words fell from his lips, a voice behind him said: "Amen;" and then from his concealment Old Morality came with tears in his eyes. Taking the boy's hand, he said:

"I know now the secret of your success, boy; you are a Christian; you trust in God."

"I recognize him as the giver of all good," responded the Young Mustanger; "but, Morality, I must confess that I am in trouble."

"What now, boy?" asked the old man.

"Did you know Jules Rocheford had carried Anita away?"

"Yes, Edith told me; she said you were after Rocheford, and so I started to follow you up."

"Well, I overtook the villain and slew him, as I supposed, for he bled profusely, and sunk down in all the apparent agonies of death. I covered his motionless form with some brush, then ran for help, for Anita lay unconscious—nearer dead than alive. When I returned both she and Rocheford were gone. He had deceived me by feigning death, and he did it well, or else I was very stupid. I supposed my sword had found his heart."

"We can catch them, can't we?" asked Morality.

"We can try," replied the youth, "and the sooner we start the better it will be."

Leaving the dead Patro, they hurried back to where Rocheford had made his camp, and taking up the villain's trail they followed it over the ridge into the valley beyond. They moved slowly, for every step of the trail had to be picked out by the closest scrutiny. The regulator's course wound here and there, and finally led back into the valley where the battle had been fought. This discovery led the pursuers to fear that Rocheford had found his way back and been joined by his friends; and while the two stood discussing the matter, they suddenly caught sight of the Frenchman's head above a clump of bushes on the opposite hillside. He was looking into the valley in a doubtful, undecided way.

"The infernal old frog-eater!" exclaimed Little Texas; "if I had my rifle here I'd drop him like a deer. Oh, if ever I get another pass at him with my sword, daylight will shine through him."

"Let's keep an eye on him, boy, and mebbe we can find where he's left the gal," said Old Morality.

"Ah, see! there he goes up the valley, now!"

"So he does; now, boy, if you'll just keep your eyes on him and see where he goes to, I'll slip over and search that hillside for the gal."

So saying, the old ranger stole across the valley and cautiously ascended the hill, while Little Texas crept away upon the trail of the regulator.

Rocheford walked rapidly, but nervously and uneasily, along for some distance, when he finally began to ascend a hill, upon the side of which our hero espied Don Rossevan's calesa. The vehicle stood upon the very spot where Black Boniface had first discovered the absence of Edith and Anita. There were no horses to it. Hard by stood the horse ridden by Black Boniface, and two other fine-looking animals, all caparisoned and ready for the rider. On the calesa sat a man with a rifle across his lap, and hard by stood Black Boniface and another of his companions. From the door of the calesa the sad face of Christie Miles looked hopelessly out into the dark, dreary wood.

Black Boniface and his men were waiting the return of those who had gone in pursuit of Edith and Anita, and they were both surprised and rejoiced to see Rocheford approaching. The captain advanced and met the Frenchman, but what passed between the two Little Texas could not learn; but, certain it was that Rocheford soon mounted a horse and rode down the valley, taking with him, from Anita's wardrobe in the calesa, a handsome shawl and a Spanish blue silk bonnet, that the maiden wore at the time of her capture at the Ruins.

Had the Boy Mustanger been possessed of any other weapon than his sword—a rifle or revolver, he would have attacked Boniface and his companions at long range. As it was, however, he dare not attack the three outlaws single-handed.

Rocheford rode rapidly down the valley, still betraying his usual nervous fears. He was conscious of the fact that Little Texas was at large, and as he had learned from experience that the youth was an enemy to be feared, he knew not what moment he might spring from ambush upon him. For this enemy, however, he was prepared, Boniface having furnished him with a brace of revolvers.

In a few minutes he reached the immediate vicinity in which he had left the unconscious Anita, and dismounting he led his horse up the hillside and hitched it to a tree. Then he advanced to the mouth of an artificial cavern, or, in other words, a "dug-out," that had been excavated years before by some hunter or trapper. In this cavern, whose entrance was concealed from the valley by bushes and vines, Rocheford had left Anita tied to a post or support, while he went in search of assistance to bear her away. Over her unconscious form he had thrown the long silken mantilla that was about her

shoulders when he captured her; and as he strode into the dark, damp, dismal place, he saw that everything was as he had left it; and stooping he lifted the silken cover from the prostrate figure, but the figure rose with the cover, and when the latter was drawn aside, the face of Old Morality—not that of Anita—was revealed to the outlaw's astonished gaze.

"Uch-oh! 'mornin', doctor!" exclaimed the old ranger, with a grin.

Rocheford dropped the mantilla in an instant and attempted to draw a revolver, but the eye of the ranger was upon him, and before the villain could even lift his revolver from his belt, a pistol flashed in his face, and he sunk down like an ox in the shambles, without a groan or struggle.

Then from the darkness of the "dug-out" came Anita, and from the outside Little Texas appeared at the mouth of the "dug-out."

"The thing worked, did it, Morality?" asked the boy.

"Like a charm; the jig's up with Dr. Rocheford," replied Morality.

Anita's heart was filled with joy when she learned that she was safe once more; but in the midst of her joy four horsemen were discovered coming up the valley. They proved to be Apache warriors returning from the pursuit of our friends under Rossevan and Miles, and but for the horse left near the cave by Rocheford they would have passed by; but the animal did not escape their eagle eyes, and in a moment they were on the alert.

"Trapped again, by Judas!" exclaimed Old Morality; "when in the thunder-rollin' will we ever git out of this accursed, demon-infested country?"

"Well, we will have to abide our time," replied Little Texas.

And so they did; but the patient Indians remained on the watch—never for a moment relaxing their vigils. Our friends could see them from the dug-out, but from the actions of the Apaches they judged they were not observed.

Again our friends felt the want of a rifle, for it would have been an easy matter to have picked the Indians off, though at the risk of bringing others down upon them. As it was, however, they would have to wait the relief of friends or the coming of night to relieve them of their dilemma. Thus waiting, every hour seemed a day, and none grew more impatient than Black Boniface. The prolonged absence of Rocheford called forth the most bitter reflections, and about the middle of the afternoon the outlaw chief came riding down the valley in quest of his lieutenant. He met the four Apaches, who pointed out the horse which Boniface recognized as that Rocheford had ridden away; and when he learned that the animal had been standing in that one spot all day, a terrible suspicion forced itself upon his mind. Concealing himself for fear of a stray bullet, he sent an Indian to reconnoiter the situation. Old Morality was watching every movement, and lying flat in the mouth of the cavern he awaited the approach of the warrior with a cocked revolver extended before him.

It was not long until he saw the bushes before him part and the face of the savage appear in the opening; but before the savage had a moment's glimpse of the place Old Morality fired and he sunk down with a cry of agony, shot through the brain.

A deaf silence followed.

Finally a few random shots were fired from the valley, the balls clipping through the bushes in front of the dug-out and burying in the hillside. Then a long silence again ensued.

The hours wore on. Rocheford's horse stood pawing the ground uneasily where his dead master had left him; and there he still stood when the sun went down and the shadows of night enveloped the land.

CHAPTER XXI. A BOGUS "KID."

UNDER cover of the first shadows Little Texas with one of Rocheford's revolvers, crept from the cavern to reconnoiter. He was gone but a few minutes when the harsh twang of a horn, which all recognized as that of Boniface, went leaping down the valley and over the hills, sending a shiver to the hearts of our friends. A few minutes later four or five horsemen came thundering up the defile, passed by the cavern and then turned and came galloping back. This was repeated several times by the same horsemen, and Little Texas, who was concealed near where they passed, saw what they were up to. It was to convey the idea, no doubt, that the valley was full of men, and that resistance on the part of those in the dug-out would be madness.

Creeping back to the cavern the youth reported his discovery, adding:

"I think six men will cover the entire strength of the enemy, and if we will act promptly and carefully, I believe we can get away from here with Anita by creeping out and hiding in the bushes, and then when they charge upon the cave we can slip away before they find out we're not in there."

"I can see no other course," said Old Morality.

At this juncture a voice in the valley was heard to shout:

"Hulloa!" It was the voice of Black Boniface, and no one answering it the call was repeated:

"Hulloa there, in the cave!"

"Let's see what's wanted, anyhow," said Little Texas, and advancing to the mouth of the cave he answered: "What do you want out there?"

"Immediate surrender!" was the cheerful response.

Old Morality and the Boy Mustanger laughed at the villain's impudence.

"We're not that kind of truck, Mr. Boniface," the lad replied.

"You can talk brave, you little fiend," replied

Boniface, "but we know very well—as well as you do—that you're there alone with that girl Anita, and it's to save unnecessary bloodshed that we offer you terms; but if you think you can contend with twenty armed men just say so."

"I have no horror of bloodshed," returned Texas; "I don't care how much outlaw and Apache blood I spill—the more the better."

"And if we think the boy's alone," chimed in Old Morality, "just crowd on us—tread our corns if you want to wake a slumberin' volcano or two—advance and balance on the corner."

There was a momentary silence on the other side. Evidently the regulators were surprised.

"I don't care," finally came from the regulator's lips, "if there's a dozen of you. We'll starve you out unless you surrender. Already fifty men surround you."

"That's a lie," said Little Texas to Morality.

"What's your terms?" called out the old ranger.

"Oh!" replied the regulator, in a sneering tone, "that sounds more like it; I thought you'd weaken. But if you'll send me that girl on Rocheford's horse you shall go free and to the devil for all I care."

"Yes, we might go free, as far as he cares," said Little Texas; "but he'll take good care to let his bloodhounds loose on us. But, Morality, his proposition has suggested an idea to me, and I believe we can yank him out of both Anita and Christie by conceding his terms."

"What! by giving up the gal? Texas, that'll be cowardly in us—I can never consent to—"

"But look here, old friend; you don't understand me."

They went back into the "dug-out," and talked with the girl and each other in low, hurried tones. There was some protest to the boy's suddenly conceived plans; but finally the ranger and maiden yielded, and going back to the mouth of the cavern he shouted:

"Old Boniface, what assurance have we that you'll treat us as you promise, providing we surrender Miss Rossevan?"

"You've my word, that's all," was the decided answer, "and you can take that or the consequence. The girl's all I care for, and have her I will in spite of you, and you can follow me if you want to."

"It is by the girl's own request that we would ever, for a moment, think of accedin' to your demands."

"That don't make any difference to me," Boniface responded, "but it does show her woman's good sense and self-sacrifice to give up to save your worthless hides from my vengeance. Put her on that horse and send her down here and I'll leave you."

"Black Boniface!" cried the sweet, quivering voice of the fair Anita, "remember that it is because I love my young friend that I consent to go with you to save him."

"That's noble and generous in you, girl," replied Boniface, "but I promise you kind treatment. You shall queen it over the Ruins de Boniface, and I know you will learn to love me fully as well as you do that little scapegrace, Little Texas."

"Oh, Senior Boniface, I know it will kill me!" again cried the maiden.

"No, I think—" began the regulator, but at this juncture a horseman came thundering up the valley, and the robber chief turning, screamed out; "Halt! who comes there?"

"A friend, captain!" was the reply of the horseman, who recognized the villain's voice; "gads, I am glad I struck you!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Boniface.

"Oh, by the gads!" the rangers and the followers of that Spaniard drew us into a trap to-day and whipped bizas out of us and—"

"Hush!" interrupted Boniface, but his prisoners had heard every word, and a moment later the voice of Old Morality rung out:

"Good! glory! friends are comin'! Come back Anita, come back quick, for friends are comin'!"

As these words fell upon the robber's ear he heard the tread of horse's feet, and saw the dark outlines of Rocheford's horse with the maiden upon it emerge into the valley; then, in obedience to Morality's order to come back he saw the horse's head turned; but quick as a flash, the regulator, who was already in his saddle, spurred along, side of the horse, and leaning over, threw his arm about the form of the cloaked and bonneted rider, and dragging her from the saddle and placing her before him, galloped away.

The captive uttered a little scream and struggled to free herself, but her efforts were in vain, and with a sob she swooned in the villain's arms.

Cries and shouts now rose on the night far down the valley, and full well Black Boniface knew what it meant. The rangers were coming like a whirlwind up the defile.

Digging his heels into his animal's sides he urged it on at a cruel speed. Up the valley he fairly flew, and soon he came to where the calesa stood.

"Stokely!" he shouted to the man left to guard Christie, "mount your horse and take that woman in your arms and let us ride! The rangers have whipped our boys and are coming; but they shall not have these women if I have to kill them, for we've paid dearly for them. Come, man, hurry up!"

In a few minutes Stokely was upon his horse with Christie in his arms.

Then away they rode up the hill among the shadows.

"I'll swear she's heavy, Bonny," said Stokely, as the half-unconscious form of his captive hung upon his arm.

"Save her, Stokely, and she'll be yours," replied

Boniface, in hopes of encouraging his man; "this little Spanish duck is not as light as a feather, for she's fainted—died like a tender flower, too. Gods! what fools men are! what they will do—what sacrifices they'll make, what dangers they'll risk for a fair woman—a pretty face! These women have cost me two score of men, I do believe—but here we are on the old Fort Concho trail with a smooth way and dense shadows. Now let the bloodhounds of the Government and of Don Rossevan and old Miles follow us if they can. Ha! ha! ha! ye gods! I must have a kiss."

He dropped the rein, lifted the head of his captive, parted the borders of her bonnet that had been crushed over her face and imprinted a kiss upon the unconscious captive's brow. He could not see her face, so deep were the shadows.

"That's a delicious kiss, Stokely, even if it has been purchased with blood. But then we needed thinning out, Stokely; we were getting too numerous for health," said the villain.

"Yes, we did, Cap," replied Stokely; "our gang was gittin' too big and unwieldy; and then Rocheford, peace to his soul, was anxious to secede and set up a rival band. He was gittin' ugly and kind o' wanted things his way. But I'm afraid some good grains—some of our best boys—have gone over with the chaff."

"Well, at any rate, we've got a delicious wife apiece," replied Boniface; "but, great Jerusalem! how I'd like to have had that other gal, also, and I would if it hadn't been for that little purgatorian, Little Texas. The infernal runt beats anything to turn up at the wrong time I ever saw—just like the hero of a novel, exactly. I hope the boys'll raise him to glory before another sun rises. He's really to be feared—or has been, for as to the future I don't propose to throw myself in his or anybody else's way. But, not changing the subject, Stokely, that woman—the one that escaped us, Edith Clayton—is my wife!"

Stokely uttered a profane exclamation. "It's a fact," continued Boniface, "though I left her the hour I married her. I only wedded her to spite her, and the whole cursed Clayton fraternity. She was a weak, silly girl then, of course, and didn't know love from a good appetite, and she waltzed right up to the altar. Her people thought I had money and would get some of it, but I matched them. I owed them a grudge and paid it, even if it were over the girl's shoulders. I always hated Edith Clayton, and I don't know why. She's pretty as a peach and gentle as a lamb, but then I just don't like her, and freely relinquish all my claim on her. But this little Spanish beauty I know I can love."

"You'd be a monster not to love her, Cap," replied Stokely.

"Yes, yes; but then we'll have to hunt other quarters, for that Spanish Rossevan and old Colonel Miles are men that will never yield until death cools them; and they will fight for their kids unto the death. If we can make New Mexico inside of a week or so, we'll not be likely to be found. Let's see; we'll about make Relay Sarony by midnight or soon after; and I think—in fact, I know—we will be safe in taking a short rest there, get something to eat and fresh horses."

"I should think by that time our women could ride a horse without the support of our arms," suggested Stokely.

"If the station can afford us four good horses we'll have them."

Relay Sarony was a station, or relay-house, kept in the interest of the robbers by an old half-breed Indian named Sarony, who pretended to be a mustanger and horse-tamer. On the night in question Sarony himself was away. In fact, he had been gone some time with Boniface in his raid into the San Saba valley, and for all Boniface knew, the old man had been killed. He knew, however, that Sarony's wife would be there to receive them, and that was all he cared for.

They rode on, keeping in the dark shadows that lay along the base of the mountains.

It was a little past midnight when the relay was reached. A little old log-cabin, a long low stable and a few cattle-pens—all stuck in under the brow of a hill almost out of sight—composed Relay Sarony. All was dark and silent in and around the place, though the barking of dogs heralded the approach of the two horsemen.

Riding up in front of the cabin Boniface shouted: "Ho, Relay Sarony!"

There was a momentary silence, then the doors opened and a sharp female voice shrieked through the night:

"Who be you out there?"

"It's me, mother—Captain Bonny," replied Boniface.

"Law-sakes alive, captin, have you fellers got around to last? Where's the ole man—I mean pap?"

"He's coming; but there's only two of us and each of us has got a kid apiece and we want to rest a little while, get something to eat and some fresh horses to ride."

"Well, you know you kin have 'em, captin, jist so free as water; but what sorts o' kids ye got?" "Gids, mother, two pretty girls," answered the outlaw.

"Law-sakes, you naughty fellers; been into somebody's corral? That's jist like you, captin, aers up to swartin' mischief. But where are the t'other fells as went with ye over to the San Saba?" "They'll be along, by-and-by."

"I recken as what pap hasn't got him a kid, has he?"

"Oh, no," replied Boniface, "but here, give us a lift, mother."

"Certainly. I'll take 'em darlins down," said the old woman, advancing and lifting Boniface's cap-

tive to the ground. "Oh, dear!" she continued, "she's all rustlin' in silk and purrin' in satin, and I'll swan she's heavy as a sick pony."

"My arm feels the effect of her weight, too," averred Boniface.

"Oh, the poor dearies can hardly stand for cramp into the body," Mother Sarony continued, as she lifted Christie to the ground; "but I'll lead 'em into the house, captin, and take good care of them while you uns put away yer horses and hay 'em."

"Thanks, mother, but I shall not lose sight of them," replied Boniface; "they have cost me enough to get them and so I don't propose to let them get away. Stokely can care for the horses."

"Very well, captain, you'll have your way I see, jist like Pap Sarony—man-like over and over. But come, my sweet dearies, and you shall have rest under Aunt Pandora Sarony's roof. I see you are tired and fatigued almost to death. A bowl of milk and some bread and butter and sich 'll strengthen yer courage and stiffen yer backs."

Pandora Sarony took the silent, sobbing captives, one on each side, and conducted them into the cabin, Boniface following behind. All was dark as Egypt in the room, but holding onto the girls Pandora led them around the room until she had found, by feeling with her foot, a couple of stools upon which she seated them, saying:

"There, now, darlins, jist wait, and I'll light a candle."

While the woman was searching for a candle and a match, Black Boniface took his position with his flack against the door, and stood patting his booted foot and whistled softly to himself.

An exclamation of satisfaction finally announced that Mother Sarony had found the candle. Then was heard the scratch of a match upon the wall. A tiny blue flame pierced the gloom. Boniface watched it in a sort of mental abstraction, and until it had grown and changed in color and, applied to the wick, flooded the room with light.

Then, holding the candle above her head, the old woman advanced to take a view of the captives. Boniface's eyes followed the light.

A scream burst from Pandora's lips. Boniface uttered an oath, and a look of baffled rage settled upon his face.

Before them, with the blue bonnet of Anita Rossevan thrown back upon his shoulders, and her long silken mantilla lying on the floor at his feet, stood Little Texas, with a revolver in each hand, and both covering the breast of Black Boniface!

CHAPTER XXII.

LITTLE TEXAS LETS HIMSELF LOOSE.

"HANDS up, Bonny!" demanded the intrepid Boy Lasso-thrower, the instant his eyes met those of the outlaw, "hands up, or I'll fire!"

Again Pandora Sarony screamed till the dogs outside set up a fearful barking.

"Hands up, Bonny," repeated the boy, "you're caged and there's no use squawkin'. I've let myself loose, and I mean—"

Black Boniface attempted to draw his pistol, but the eye of the boy saw the movement, and then there was a flash, a report, a groan, and the fall of a heavy body. Black Boniface had met his fate. Again had the young actor in the drama turned up when least expected and least wanted.

As Boniface went down, Texas turned to the old woman and exclaimed:

"Set that light on the table—quick! and be silent or I'll shoot you, too!"

Shivering with abject terror the old woman obeyed, and then sunk cowering in the corner, crooning to herself.

Alarmed by the report of the revolver, Stokely hurried from the stable to see what was wrong. A bullet went crashing through his brain as he entered the door; and then the worst was over and Christie had been rescued.

"Now, thank God, I guess we've got a clear field, Christie," the brave youth said, with some emotion, as he turned to his fair companion, whose brain was in a wild whirl of excitement and fear; for not until the familiar voice of the Boy Mustanger was heard did she know but that Anita Rossevan was her fellow captive; and even then she was in doubt as she looked upon the slight form of the youth in the silken robes and pretty bonnet of the Spanish maiden. A very few words, in connection with what she had witnessed, however, set her mind aright, and with a sense of boundless joy and delight she realized that she had been rescued from the power of the outlaws, and that, too, by the indomitable Boy Mustanger.

Clasping the boy's hand in both of hers, the grateful woman, with streaming eyes, called the blessings of Heaven upon the noble youth's head; then, as she sunk back into her chair, almost fainting, she said:

"Little Texas, this is a miracle."

"It was a narrow risk to run, that's a fact, but I'll do anything for an innocent woman," replied the boy; "and if Old Morality come out as well as I have, Anita is safe, also."

"But where is sister Edith, Texas?"

"Oh, she's safe and well; but I'll declare this beats all the nights I ever passed. I couldn't hardly hold in when I heard them poor devils talking about their wives and the future, and when old Bonny kissed me once in the dark, thinkin' I was Nita, I was sure I'd laugh right in his face. I tell you what I hung most awful tight on his arm, and kept a sniffing and a sobbing as though I was heart-broken. I wanted to tire him out so he'd got me in a position where I could spring upon him at an advantage, and if I hadn't 'a' heard him say there was no one here but a woman, I'd 'a' sprung my trap before—keep still there, old woman—quite down—"

"Oh, the poor captin is dead, dead!" she moaned, wringing her bony hands.

"Yes, and you'll be dead, *dead* if you don't hold that clapper of yours still," replied the boy; then, turning to Christie, continued: "but I was most awfully afraid Bonny would discover the cheat imposed upon him, for I'm lots heavier'n Anita, and if he'd taken only a close peep at my face he'd see'd it wasn't the face of an angel. Oh, wasn't it good, Christie, the way they talked about the kids? Ah, but we've proved bad pets for Boniface; and jist as soon as possible we'll borrow a pair of fresh horses and line out. Say, Mother Sarony—turning to the old woman—"can't you give us a bit of something to eat?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the woman, with a devilish, significant glitter in her eyes. "I'll give you some bread and milk and meats."

She rose to her feet and started toward the cupboard.

"Hold on there, you old rascal!" cried Little Texas, "you're too anxious 'bout feedin' us. We don't want you fixin' up things for us, come to think. Back to your corner and 'quile' or I'll have to shoot you, too."

With the look of a she-wolf driven from her quarry the old woman slunk back into the corner.

"Christie," continued the boy, "won't you see what there is in that cupboard? I'll keep watch."

Christie arose and with quick step advanced to the cupboard and examined its supplies. She found some bread, cold meat and a pan of milk which she placed upon the table with the necessary dishes.

Then the maid and mustanger sat down to supper. They ate with a keen relish, for they had fasted long, and had about concluded their meal when the clatter of hoofs broke suddenly upon their ears.

Rising to his feet Little Texas hastened to the door. Horsemen were coming down the road from the north.

"Christie, come!" cried the youth, "some one is coming!"

The maiden seized her hat and shawl and started toward the door. Little Texas had already passed out into the yard, and as she was about to cross the threshold a hand seized her from behind and jerked her back. Then the heavy door was slammed shut and bolted.

"I am not as dead as I might be!" a voice hissed in her ear, and, looking up, Christie beheld the living face of Black Boniface looking down upon her! The villain had only been wounded and stunned by the Boy Mustanger's bullet!

A scream burst from the maiden's lips. Little Texas tried to force the door, but in vain. At this juncture the approaching horsemen drew rein before the cabin, and the boy, standing in the shadow of the building, saw that one was a man, the other a woman. Inside the cabin he heard the voice of Boniface.

"Hullo, in there!" shouted the man, and his voice sounded strangely familiar to the Young Mustanger.

A moment passed and then the call was repeated. Little Texas started from his covert and advanced toward the man.

"If am not mistaken," he said, "it is Captain Lore Reynolds."

"Good heavens!" burst from the man's lips.

"Oh, senior! It is the Boy Mustanger!" burst from the lips of the woman.

To our hero's surprise he found himself in the presence of Captain Reynolds and Anita de Rossevan.

"What has brought you here, Captain Reynolds?" the boy asked.

"We were forced to come this way to elude the enemy," replied the captain; "we were cut off from the main column and forced into a narrow valley and compelled to follow it. But what cabin is this?"

"Relay Sarony—a robber station," replied Little Texas.

"And what are you doing here?"

In a few words Little Texas narrated his adventure with Boniface, the supposed death of the outlaw and rescue of Christie, and the final denouement.

"You don't tell me Black Boniface and Christie are in that cabin, do you?" exclaimed Captain Reynolds.

"Yes, captain; and God only knows what moment a horde of his friends may be upon us."

Captain Reynolds leaped to the ground, and giving the reins of his horse to Anita, advanced with Texas to the door of the hut and listened. All was still within. He rapped upon the door. There was no response. An ax was leaning against the side of the building, and taking it up, Reynolds dealt the door a few sturdy blows. It yielded and burst in. The room was in darkness and silence. Little Texas called the name of Christie, but there was no answer. The building was deserted. The two began groping about the room. Reynolds stumbled and fell over a prostrate body. It was the dead form of Stokely.

"Captain, they have escaped, I am afraid," said Little Texas, bitterly; "yes, here is a back window open. Oh, heavens!"

"Hark!" commanded Reynolds.

A scream outside came to their ears. The two rushed out into the yard just in time to see a man dash alongside the fair Anita, drag her from her horse and gallop away.

"Oh, great heavens! Anita is gone!" cried Reynolds, leaping into his saddle; "come, Texas, mount Anita's horse, and let us give pursuit."

In a minute both were mounted and in pursuit of the outlaw; but the chase lasted but for a few minutes. The regulator entered the dark woods and was lost from sight, and sick, almost, at heart, the captain and mustanger drew rein.

"Captain, we have both committed blunders that

may cost us the lives of those girls," said the Boy Mustanger, sadly.

"Yes, Texas," replied Reynolds, with the bitterest agony; "we may never set eyes upon them again, for we will be unable to continue the pursuit until daylight. By that time they will be miles away."

"Captain, I can never face Colonel Miles again—never, unless I can go to him with his daughter. I have no excuse for my blunder in lettin' ole Boniface defeat me as he did, for Dr. Rocheford played the same trick on me but yesterday, and I should have been sure he was dead. No, I shall stay here and take the villain's trail again to-morrow."

"And I will stay with you, Texas; those girls must not be left to such a fate—but bark! More horsemen are coming up the valley."

The two sought the shelter of the woods. A dozen horsemen rode up and halted before the cabin. They were regulators and Indians—no doubt from the battle-field in the Double Mountain. Some of them dismounted and entered the cabin. A light soon shone from the open door. Then high words, intermingled with oaths and exclamations, came to the ears of the captain and Boy Mustanger. They had found the cabin deserted, and the body of Stokely upon the floor.

Finally one of the regulators came out into the yard and placing a horn to his lips, blew a sharp blast upon it. Scarcely had the echoes died away ere the twang of another horn answered it from afar off among the hills; and then the regulators leaped into their saddles and dashed away in the direction whence the sound came. To them it was a well-known signal.

Again and again the outlaw blew a blast upon his horn, and again and again the answer came leaping down from among the distant hills, guiding the course of the cavalcade.

"Captain," said the Boy Mustanger, "they will pass near us—they are coming this way. That was Boniface's call among the hills—come, let us fall in and go with them; in their haste and in the darkness they will not discover our presence."

Down past the two friends galloped the outlaws in a broken column at a breakneck speed; and turning their horses' heads, Captain Reynolds and the Boy Mustanger wheeled into line and galloped away with the robber band.

On through the dark, gloomy woods they rode in a silence that was broken only by the trample of hoofs, the jingle of trappings, and the clangor of the distant horn.

It was so dark that Little Texas could not distinguish the form of Captain Reynolds from those of the outlaws; but the darkness was that which precedes the coming of day, and what was to be effected by their daring ride must be done soon.

The peals of the guiding horn became nearer and louder each minute, and finally the quivering blast rose but a few rods before them. Then a voice cried out:

"Who comes there?" It was the voice of Black Boniface.

"Friends, captain," responded one of the regulators; "how have you got along with your kids?"

"Bad, indeed," responded Boniface, with an oath; "did you not stop at the station?"

"We did, and found Stokely there dead. What does it mean?"

"Little Texas was there when I arrived at the station, and he slew Stokely, but I outgeneraled him," explained Boniface, though he took good care not to confine himself to the truth concerning his adventure with the Boy Mustanger; "I have the girls here with me, and Mother Sarony, afraid of that young fiend, came with me."

"Have you seen anything of Pap Sarony?" the old woman asked, in an eager, anxious tone.

"I'm sorry to tell you, mother, he was slain in a fight with the settlers and rangers to-day," answered one Christie Diebold.

A scream of agony burst from the old woman's lips, and in her sudden paroxysms of grief, she fell from her horse, dragging Christie Miles, who was seated behind her, to the earth with her. Seating herself upon the ground the old widow began a mournful lamenting that touched the hearts of Christie and Anita with pity.

Black Boniface dismounted, leaving Anita seated upon his horse, and going to the weeping woman endeavored to comfort her. But all was in vain. The more he talked, the louder she moaned.

Meanwhile, Little Texas and Captain Reynolds were silent listeners to all that was said. The band had gathered around their chief, some dismounting and others keeping their saddles. Texas and Reynolds kept under the overhanging boughs, although it was impossible to distinguish any one in the darkness. A bright star, however, drifting up the eastern sky, told them that morning was fast approaching.

"Captain," said Texas, leaning over in his stirrup and whispering to Reynolds, "we've got to be a-spur-rin' round or day'll be upon us. There those two girls are, within two rods of us. Shall we make a dash and attempt to snatch them away? or, shall we creep up and take them when the robbers are not expecting us?"

"I am afraid either plan will prove fruitless," replied Reynolds; "but then we can try. I will take Anita and draw the attention of the regulators, and then you can come up and rescue Christie. If we get separated, and don't get shot, we'll meet back at Sarony's cabin. Ah! listen to what Boniface is saying!"

"I left Little Texas and one of the rangers at the cabin," the outlaw was saying, "and if about a dozen of us would slip back there we might take them in, and avenge the death of poor Stokely and Sarony."

Every man present volunteered his services to go in search of the dreaded foes, but Boniface having learned, by bitter experience, that discretion was the better part of valor, detailed three regulators and five Apaches to go back, keeping about the same number with him.

As the detachment mounted and turned to leave, Reynolds whispered:

"Now, Texas, may Heaven help us!"

As he spoke, the captain rode out from under the tree, among the horsemen that were passing to and fro, and turned alongside of Anita, who still sat upon Boniface's horse, her head bowed in hopeless despair. Without even checking his horse, the daring young ranger threw his arm about the maiden's waist, dragged her from the saddle, and then putting spur, galloped away.

Anita uttered a scream of terror. Taken so suddenly and unawares, she knew not what violent hands had seized her. But Captain Reynolds spoke one word, and her fears had ended. A cry of joy burst from her lips.

Black Boniface, startled by the maiden's cry, uttered an oath, leaped into his saddle, and with a yell started in hot pursuit. His men, acting under the impulse of the moment joined in the pursuit, yelling like fiends and firing their rifles and pistols in the air.

In the excitement Christie and Mother Sarony were left alone. This left the field clear for Little Texas, who, riding forward, called Christie's name. With a glad cry of joy the maiden broke from Mother Sarony's grasp and ran to the Boy Mustanger's side, for even in the moment of her fear and distress she recognized the voice of the darling boy.

In a few moments the lad had her seated on the horse behind him, and was galloping down the road; nor was he a moment too soon, for it occurred to Boniface, upon a second thought, that he was acting rashly, and he turned back, leaving his men to continue the chase. But he found Mother Sarony alone, and his fury knew no bounds when he learned from her that Little Texas had escaped with Christie. He blew an ear-splitting blast upon his horn, and in answer, a number of his men, red-skins and white, came thundering back, wild with excitement and crazed with confusion.

As fast as their horses could travel, Little Texas and Christie Miles made their way back along the dim, military road toward Relay Sarony. Although Reynolds had gone in an opposite direction it was understood that they met at the cabin, and he knew the captain would be there unless he should meet with trouble; and so a few minutes' ride brought them in front of the cabin. Reynolds, however, was not there; but he rode under some trees and waited, and soon a horseman came down the road and paused before them. It was the captain and Anita, and having made their presence known, the maidens and their gallant rescuers congratulated each other upon their exploit and escape.

But they had no time to tarry, for they were far from safe. Horsemen were approaching from the north at a fearful speed, and so the fugitives moved on southward along the old trail. But they had pursued this course but a short way when the thunder of hoofs was heard coming up before them, and so they were compelled to turn to the right into a narrow, mountain defile, not knowing either, whither it would lead them.

As the darkness was intense Little Texas dismounted and led the way on foot. They moved along at a brisk walk. They felt assured that their diversion would give them, at least, two hours' start of the enemy, which would enable them to elude all danger from Boniface and his followers.

Slowly the red beams of dawn kindled in the eastern sky and finally burst into flame. Day was upon them with all its glories and all its dangers. The faces of the maidens were pale and worn, and those of their rescuers anxious and determined.

On either side of them rose the rugged, picturesque mountains. The valley was narrow and thinly wooded, and the way was rough and stony for the jaded, footsore horses.

Hunger and fatigue were telling upon the fugitives, yet no word of complaint escaped their lips. On the contrary, Captain Reynolds and Little Texas conversed with the maidens in a free, cheerful spirit that filled the breasts of all with hope. But, in the midst of their fancied security, the ring of many hoofs suddenly broke upon their ears. Boniface was after them, and gathering the reins the fugitives put their horses to their utmost speed.

On down the narrow valley for more than an hour the race continued, until finally the bosom of a placid river burst upon the view of the fugitives. It was the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos river.

Upon the banks of the stream the four soon drew rein. A cry of surprise and disappointment burst from the lips of the two men. There was no escape, either up or down the river. Behind them came a score of Apache savages and white outlaws, while before them lay the murmuring river with its treacherous sands.

"My God, Texas! what shall we do?" exclaimed Reynolds, no longer able to control his emotions.

"We must 'sink or swim,'" replied the boy; "it is our only alternative—come, I will lead the way. Keep your horse moving when you enter the water, for fear of the quicksands."

The youth spurred his horse forward and entered the river, closely followed by Reynolds and Anita. The horses swam a few yards and then struck a sand-bar, hidden under but a foot of water.

"Heavens, be careful!" cried the Boy Mustanger.

The horses began to flounder violently in the sand and water, and in the attempt to turn them and get back into deep water, the fugitives saw that they had committed a fatal blunder. The animals sunk

to their knees in the quicksand and ceased to struggle.

Little Texas quickly exchanged glances with Captain Reynolds. Fear and distress were written upon each face.

The clatter of approaching hoofs could be distinctly heard, and, glancing up the defile, the fugitives could now see the horde of fast-moving horsemen sweeping toward them.

The situation was a critical one from which there seemed no escape. The heads of the fugitives grew dizzy, and their hearts sick as they saw the placid water gliding past them, and felt the quivering forms of their poor, jaded horses sinking down in the treacherous sands of the smiling river!

CHAPTER XXIII.

BONIFACE CHEATED AGAIN.

"FRIENDS," cried Captain Reynolds, "there is no hope for us!"

"Not unless we leap into the water and endeavor to swim ashore," replied Little Texas; "and even then we dare not let our feet touch the sand. Ah! listen! The Indians and outlaws have discovered us, and—"

His words were cut short by the sound of a strange voice shouting:

"Hold steady, strangers, for we're comin' to yer rescue!"

All eyes turned in the direction from whence the sound came, and beheld a small bateau, with two occupants, a white man and an Indian, coming toward them. To Little Texas both were strangers, yet their presence gave him hope.

Both red-man and white were at the oars, and the prow of the bateau plowed the water with great rapidity. In a moment the craft ran alongside the sinking horses and our four young friends dropped from their animals' backs into it; then the boat sped on and soon disappeared from the enemy's view around a bend in the river.

Not a word was spoken until they had gone several rods, when the old man remarked:

"You were in a sort of a deafkity, weren't ye, folks?"

"We have been rescued from the very jaws of death," replied Captain Reynolds, gratefully.

"Yes, yes," replied the old man, "these Brazos sands are awful treacherous."

"Yes, and Texas Indians and regulators are awful devilish," added Little Texas.

"Then the regulators were after ye, too?" questioned the old man.

"Yes, with Black Boniface at their head," replied Reynolds.

"Horn of Joshua!" burst from the stranger's lips; "do you mean to tell me Boniface is among that pack of yellin' demons?"

"I do, stranger," Reynolds responded.

The old man dropped his oars, rose to his feet and glanced back up the river, a strange light passing over his thin, cadaverous face. The Indian, never turning his eyes or uttering a word, plied his oars with all his might.

"I would give a little fortune to draw a bead on Black Boniface," said the old man; then he sat down and took up the oars again.

"Stranger, whom have we to thank for this rescue?" asked Captain Reynolds.

The old man made no response, but turning the boat he ran it across the river and into a little cove where the foliage of the trees, hanging to the water, concealed them from view. Then, laying down the oars, the stranger turned and said:

"Folks, my name is Kit Bandy."

"Kit Bandy?" exclaimed Reynolds; "I have heard of him. You are a detective."

"A kind o' a butcher-knife sort of a detective," he replied, with a broad, comical grin; "and this injin is Red Raven, my friend and guide. We're after Black Boniface."

"I wish to God you had him," said the captain.

"If we have time and hold our breath, we'll rake that 'cappy' from taw, now mind what I tell you. We're no slovens 'bout sich things, friends; but if I war a bettin' man, I'd go a prize that boy is Little Texas."

"You are right, Mr. Bandy," responded the Young Mustanger.

"Good!—shake; I had an awful notion to hunt you up when I set out after Black Boniface, but as the Raven here had a good reputation, I took him. Folks, ye had any breakfast? Ain't, eh? Well, we've got some cold meats and biscuits here—not very good for angels, sich, as you've got with ye, but it'll keep off starvation."

The old detective brought out his supplies, and glad enough were the maidens to partake of the coarse viands. They were greatly refreshed in body and mind after they had eaten, and some of the wonted spirit of Christie Miles and Anita Rossevan began to return.

Nothing had been seen of the enemy since they had entered the cove; but while they sat discussing the events of the past few days and nights, Red Raven was seen to start and fix his black eyes upon something upon the opposite shore, at the same time grasp his rifle.

"What is it, Raven?" asked Old Kit.

"Bad 'Paches—bad white men," replied the Friendly.

Peering through a little opening in the surrounding foliage, our friends saw a dozen Apache warriors and outlaws running along the opposite shore like heads upon a trail.

Kit Bandy laughed softly to himself as he watched the movements of the foe.

"It's a good thing water leaves no trail," he said, "or them varlets 'd give us a peck of trouble. Texas do you see Black Boniface among that gang?"

"He is not there," replied the boy, and scarcely had the last word fallen from his lips when a bullet came clipping through the foliage, and the report of a rifle on the opposite shore rolled back through the mountains in quivering intonations.

A little cry of pain burst from the lips of the Boy Mustanger, and he threw up his hands and clasped his face.

"Oh, Texas has been wounded!" cried Christie, forgetting that the enemies were so near.

Little Texas looked around. A faint smile was upon his face. Across his left cheek was a red welt, the track of the enemy's bullet.

"I am not badly hurt, Christie," he said, "though it was a close call. The heathens suspect we are hidden along here somewhere, and are exploring the situation with bullets. If they should cross the river they might give us trouble."

"Yes, indeed," replied Old Kit, "and the sooner we get out of here the better, for they'll be sure to cross the river sooner or later. Once in the mountain fastnesses and I think we four fellers, fightin' in defense of the two little angels, can hold our own with the hull caboodle of Satan."

The little band of fugitives remained there an hour or so longer, then landed and started southward through the hills. Their way lay over a rough, broken country, and although all were in good spirits, and greatly refreshed, their progress was and slow tedious.

Old Kit Bandy and Red Raven brought up the rear, keeping just in sight of their four friends; and they had journeyed some five or six miles when those in advance were suddenly startled by the discharge of firearms.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Reynolds, "Bandy and Red Raven have been attacked!"

"I am afraid so," replied the Boy Mustanger, "but from the sound of the firing I should think a regiment was engaged."

"Oh! I pray that kind old man and his red friend are not in danger!" said Christie.

The firing lasted for several minutes, but before Texas and Reynolds had decided what was best for them to do, it ceased altogether. Then followed several minutes of dread suspense, which was finally ended by the appearance of a number of horsemen.

"Hurrah!" burst from the lips of Captain Reynolds, "we are saved! Those are my Texan Rangers!"

And so they were. A few moments later the rangers, accompanied by Don Rossevan and Colonel Israel Miles, drew rein before the fugitives. Then there rose on the morning air, cries of joy and shouts of victory that were taken up by the echoes and repeated in almost every valley of the Double Mountains.

Rejoiced, indeed, were Colonel Miles and Don Rossevan to meet their young friends; and while father and daughter, brother and sister, were recounting their adventures and trials, Little Texas and the captain paid their respects to the rangers. Old Kit Bandy and Red Raven had suddenly disappeared, nor could the rangers give any account of them. They had not even seen them. They had come suddenly upon a score of Indians and outlaws and had attacked and defeated them with great slaughter. Boniface was seen among the enemy at the beginning of the fight, but he had escaped.

Captain Reynolds ordered a search for Kit and the Indian, but they could not be found, and after waiting nearly a half a day for them in vain, the little band resumed its march southward. About sunset they reached the camp of the settlers near where Boniface had deserted the calesa.

Edith Clayton was there to receive her little sister, Christie, and her young friend Anita; and then and there was another joyous meeting.

The night was spent there in the valley, and early the next morning the band took its line of march southward. The three women were given the calesa with Colonel Miles and Don Rossevan as companions.

Little Texas recovered his horse, saddle and lasso, his sword and armor, and once more rode forth the free, happy young knight of the prairie. Old Morality was also there, the same lively and jolly old man.

The first night the party encamped in the very grove wherein Black Boniface had encamped the night before he reached the Double Mountain, and here they passed a pleasant time, and bright and early the following morning they were astride. All were about ready to begin the day's journey when the man on guard announced the approach of three horsemen. This delayed departure and threw everybody into excitement.

In a few minutes the horsemen approached the grove and drew up before the party. They were Old Kit Bandy, Red Raven and Black Boniface. The last was a captive.

Cheer after cheer rose upon the morning air, for Little Texas, Captain Reynolds and the maidens had told all who the old man and the red-skin were. "And so you took Bonny In, Kit?" questioned Reynolds.

"Yes, by the horn of old Joshua! the gentleman put his bonnie head right into our trap, and we not only got him but a horse apiece to carry us overland to the post," replied Bandy.

"Thank Heaven! our troubles from that scamp will be at an end," said Colonel Miles; "I can see now that Seneca Lucas, Victor Ure and Black Boniface resemble—in fact are one."

"Oh, he's an owdacious villain!" replied Kit, "and's wanted badly by parties at St. Louis. There's a price on his head."

This conversation was carried on aside. Bandy had dismounted, leaving Boniface with Red Raven, who had, also, dismounted and stood by the outlaw's horse. Boniface, with his hands bound at his back,

sat his horse talking and laughing with as much bravado and impudence as though surrounded by his own reckless men. He was mounted upon his own horse, and suddenly, when all eyes were turned toward jolly Old Kit Bandy, the outlaw slipped his bonds, drove his booted foot into Red Raven's face, and then, with a yell, dug his heels into his horse's sides and escaped into the open prairie.

A cry of dismay burst from three-score lips, and every man started for his horse.

"A cool thousand to the man that catches him!" yelled Bandy.

Out of the grove and away in pursuit swept two-score horsemen in a solid column, yelling and firing their pistols, as if such a din would terrify Black Boniface. For awhile the pursuers all rode together, but finally they began to string out across the plain, and foremost among them was the Boy Mustanger upon Lightfoot and with lasso in hand.

The youth was in his element now, and his horse being fresh it fairly skimmed the prairie like a bird upon the wing. He gained rapidly upon his followers and upon the fleeing outlaw, and those watching the chase from the grove held their breath in dire suspense.

All knew that Boniface possessed no weapon, yet they had serious doubts as to the result of the Boy Mustanger encountering him in a hand-to-hand struggle. Fervent, indeed, were the prayers that went up from many lips for the brave boy.

Black Boniface was headed directly toward the Double Mountains, but when he was still miles from the fastness of that stronghold, he saw that one of his pursuers was close upon his heels. He saw that it was Little Texas, and a curse rose to his lips.

"Halt, ole robber, halt!" the boy suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs; but Boniface heeded him not.

"I'll make him hear and heed me," the Young Mustanger mused, and then he gathered his lasso and held it behind him with extended arm. He spoke to Lightfoot and the horse shot forward, carrying the lad within ten feet of the outlaw. Then he let fly his lasso. With a hiss the coiled rope shot forward, and true to the aim, the fatal noose fell about the outlaw's head. Before the villain could realize his peril, the lasso was drawn taut and he jerked violently backward and thrown to the ground. The fall stunned him, and he lay for a long time unconscious; but when he finally recovered his senses, he found himself surrounded by a score of men. Among them was his captor, Little Texas, and the Texan rangers.

The outlaw was securely bound, placed upon a horse and taken back to the grove. On the way they were met by Kit Bandy, who, riding up to the Boy Mustanger and taking his hand, said:

"Boy, you are a good one, and when you throw the lasso that floored Boniface, you drew a golden prize."

And so he did.

Without further delay the parties took up their homeward march, and in the course of three days reached the Ruins de Rossevan without further trouble from the enemy.

Here Kit Bandy, the old detective, rested a few days, then with his prisoner, and accompanied by Red Raven, he set out for St. Louis.

With the rescue of Christie Miles and Edith Clayton ended the first and last troubles of Colonel Israel Miles's little colony in the Lone Star State; and with the capture of Black Boniface and the death of Jules Rocheford ended the power of the freebooters of the prairie in the valley of the San Saba and the South-west. Moreover, the final conviction and death of Boniface removed all questionable obstacles from between Don Juan de Rossevan and Edith Clayton's love, and in the course of time that noble Spanish exile and recluse, had the supreme joy and pleasure of leading Edith to the altar of wedded love; and no truer and happier pair ever joined their hearts and affections.

In the gallant young ranger, Captain Reynolds, Anita found a noble and chivalrous lover, a true husband and a faithful devoted companion for life.

Colonel Miles's colony grew and flourished, and although it had many trials, hardships and privations to contend with at first, it finally overcame them all—that indomitable spirit of pioneer life triumphed, and peace, happiness and all the wonted comforts of life were the final heritage of all.

Old Morality ever remained in the employ and society of Don Rossevan. He had become as one of that gentleman's family, and when the weight of years had bowed his form and traced his brow with wrinkles, Don Rossevan made light and pleasant for him the burden of life, while the fair Anita, ever faithful to her religious duties, turned the old man's faltering footsteps into that narrow way which leads into Eternal Light.

Little Texas continued for some years in the wild, free life of a mustanger; but, in the meantime, he visited, regularly, the home of his first and only love, Christie Miles. And as he grew older and mingled more and more in the fair girl's society, he began to realize that there was a broad gulf separating them in every way except in love. He fully realized that his social and intellectual culture was far below that of his promised bride—a difference which so often leads to the alienation of the affections, and to suffering and misery. But instead of growing despondent and hopeless, the lad's spirit became aroused, and with that resolute determination which had characterized all the acts of his boyhood days, he went to work to educate himself. In the school and college he labored, and never until he had gained that goal, and received the crown of all earthly happiness, did he rest from his labors of love.

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